The future of electronic entertainment issue#138

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Plus: Capcom's Clover
talks Viewtiful Joe 2 an
and the legacy of Looki

PlayStation Portable

Handheld gaming finally grows up



Plus: the best from E3

Including Nintendo's DS, The Legend Of Zelda, Halo 2, Metroid Prime 2, Half-Life 2, FFXII, DMC3, Doom 3 and Resident Evil 4



PLEASE DO NOT TOUCH



The future of electronic entertainment



Three million dollars. Or £1,656,801.73 going by the exchange rate as this issue goes to press. The budget of one of the many firstperson shooters in this month's E3 report, do you think? Or could it perhaps be the amount Microsoft is set to spend on Xbox Live ads in the run up to Christmas? No. Three million dollars was, if our reports are correct, the amount Sony Computer Entertainment America spent on its E3 party this year. But then hiring out a venue on a hilltop overlooking the LA Dodgers' stadium, featuring five different tents filled with live entertainment from The Black Eyed Peas, Missy Elliott, The Crystal Method and some dodgy circus troupe calling itself El Circo just doesn't come cheap nowadays. And then you have to ensure your 5,000-invited guests have enough free booze to pour down their eager throats until the early hours of the morning...

Yes, being a major player in today's videogame market is an expensive business. And if Sony can afford to throw this sort of money at a little shindig for E3, just imagine what it's prepared to do to make its new console work.

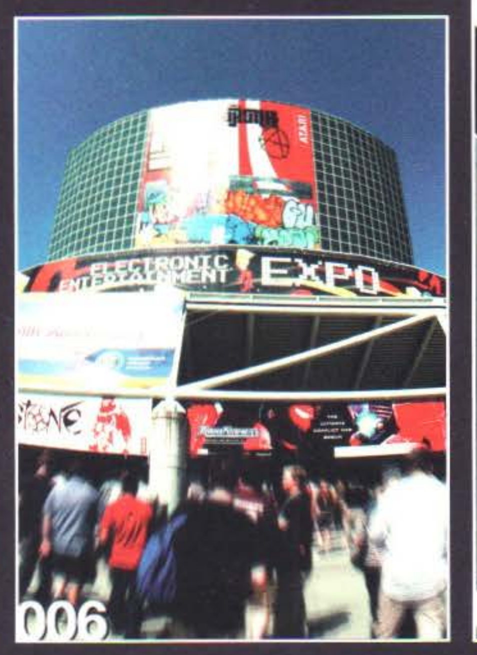
In truth, PlayStation Portable does a good job of selling itself. You've never seen a handheld console like it, not only because its graphics are of such obviously high quality but because they've viewed on an absolutely delicious screen. But more on this inside the issue (see p14).

This year's E3 was a story of excess in many ways, but we've cut through the glitz, glamour and glorification of the event to bring you commentary on no less than 111 of the thousands of titles demonstrated in Los Angeles. All told, it was one of the better E3s in recent memory, and there really is something here to suit all tastes (especially if you like games featuring soldiers shooting each others' faces off – commonly from a firstperson perspective).

If there isn't, write in and tell us what you think gaming is lacking right now. In the meantime, we've got the after-effects of a rather big bash to sleep off...



Features









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directory july

the 'I want to hold your handheld' issue





















The best of E3 2004, including:

Regulars

Testscreen

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"Something has to be done, but nothing too original, because, hey, this is Hollywood"

frontend

News and views from e-entertainment's cutting edge

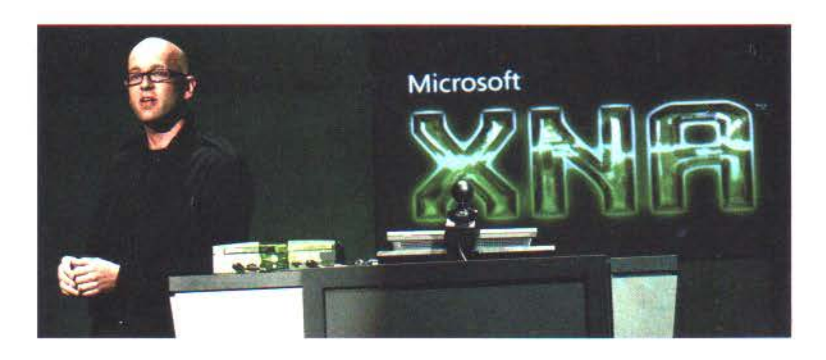
Photography: **Suzanne Bernel**

New platforms steal show at E3 2004

Microsoft, Sony and Nintendo all hit hard with new software in Los Angeles, but PSP and Nintendo DS prove real draws as the new handheld era looms



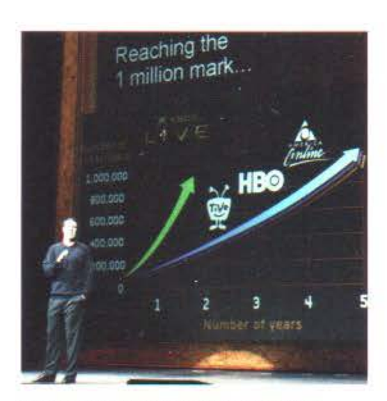
The Americans in attendance seemed to appreciate EA's sporting stars turning up to promote its commitment to Xbox Live, although in truth most of the applause was aimed at Muhammad Ali





The Los Angeles Shrine Auditorium (left) provided ample capacity for the world's gaming press (and assorted other industry types), all eager to watch Microsoft's next move. J Allard spoke only briefly on the company's XNA initiative (above), and offered a new version of Pseudo Interactive's 'Crash' demo – this time with two cars colliding head on. It was a fine presentation, although the technology failed to work attendees into a lather, which presumably was the intention

With over 65,000 visitors throughout its three-day duration, this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo was the biggest to date – a fitting achievement for a no-holds-barred gaming circus celebrating its tenth anniversary. On the face of it, and despite rumours emanating from the world's biggest players suggesting a non-attendance as soon as 2005, the industry's yearly convergence upon Los Angeles has never been more important. The press conferences are bigger, the parties more extravagant, the battle to win our hearts and minds, and consumer dollars by association, more determined.



Robbie Bach sought to emphasise Xbox Live's success by comparing its take-up to that of AOL, TiVo and HBO subscriptions

E3 hasn't really been a three-day affair for some time, but Microsoft's decision this year to kick off its grandstanding two days prior to the actual show's doors opening hammered home its desire to be first up to the plate, as they say here. And so it was that on the evening of May 10 the 6,300-seat Shrine Auditorium in downtown LA hosted the company's 2004 Xbox press conference. Previously used to stage the likes of the Grammys, prior to E3 beginning it was where videogame industry professionals, softened up by trays full of Xbox-green cocktails, learned about Microsoft's five-way Xbox Live video-conferencing software (a poke in the eye for Sony's *EyeToy Chat*, announced just before E3), its plans to lure casual gamers to its console via web games and conversions of 20-year-old coin-ops (see J Allard interview, p46), how *Halo 2* is shaping up (see p42), and the importance of Electronic Arts finally buying into the Xbox Live dream, a development of such apparent consequence that a bunch of American sports stars were paid top dollar to turn up on stage for the cameras, the appearance of Muhammad Ali among them being enough to get most of the audience standing and cheering.

But not before we'd been offered up a big-screen spoof of smash American television series The Apprentice, featuring Donald Trump pitching Xbox management team J Allard, Robbie Bach and Peter Moore against lookalikes purporting to be Sony trio Ken Kutaragi, Kaz Hirai and Andrew House, challenging them to come up with a viable online gaming service for their respective consoles. Where Microsoft had previously been reluctant to aim punches at its rivals (at least in public), this was a knee directly to Sony's vulnerable groin. The PlayStation boys failed and lost their jobs. The Xbox team was rewarded with the rights to make an RPG of Trump's life. The audience obediently lapped it up.

The PlayStation boys lost their jobs. The Xbox team were rewarded with the rights to make a Donald Trump RPG. The audience lapped it up

Some three years since it launched Xbox, Microsoft is really hitting its stride. This was demonstrated on the show floor by a line-up of genuinely intriguing titles on the platform, many offering the types of high production values that seem to be the key to unlocking serious chart success nowadays. The company's press conference was vast in scale, serious in intent, and it ran mostly without a hitch. The standard had been set.



Halo 2's official launch date, November 9, was a big enough deal for Peter Moore to have it tattooed on his arm – albeit only in henna



Witnessing PSP's video playback quality was a definite highlight of Sony's event (even if the subject matter wasn't up to much). *Tales Of Eternia* showed its gaming credentials (right)



Sony slashes PS2, talks online

And so, the following morning, it was off to the less-glamorous, hangar-like LA Center Studios, where Sony was holding its pre-E3 briefing. First on the agenda was the news that PlayStation2's North American retail price was to be reduced by $50 to $150 (£83). Given that 90 per cent of all PS1 consoles shifted once the hardware was slashed to $150 and below, Sony suggested that its successor would follow suit, taking it into the homes of a new world of gamers. Then it was time for the company to address what has long been a difficult area for PS2: online gaming.

This will be "a growth year for PS2 online," said Kaz Hirai, who went on to claim that 100,000 new users will buy into the service each month

This year will be "a growth year for online gaming on PS2," said SCEA president **Kaz Hirai**, who went on to claim that 100,000 new users will buy in to the service each month, chiefly attracted by over 100 titles that will offer some form of online component before Christmas.

And this will be a money-spinner: game publishers will be able to charge for downloadable content such as additional levels, which follows Microsoft's recently rolled-out Xbox Live revenue model (*PGR2* owners can now download a Paris component for a cost of £3). Hirai acknowledged that Sony has been slow to explore online revenue streams with its console hardware, "but not for long..."

On the community side, Sony promisec that users will soon be able to trade game components, such as cars in *Gran Turismo 4*, all downloadable to a forthcoming higher-capacity PS2 memory card.

Finally on the topic of online, Sony coul not resist a dig of its own, assuring game publishers that it would not be seeking to control their intellectual properties. In other words, it wouldn't be 'doing a Microsoft'.

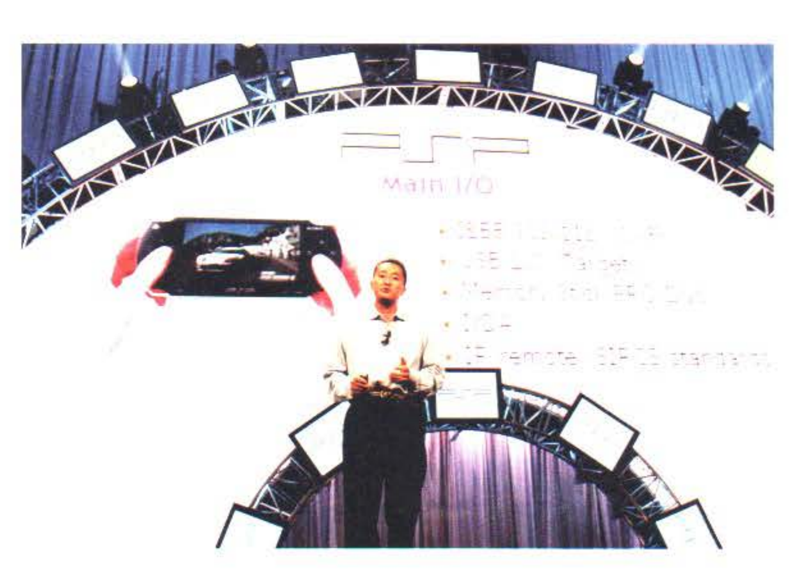


Sony's pre-E3 presentation wasn't nearly as theatrical as its competition's showings. It was all about exclusive 'AAA' content on PS2 (right), PSP specs (below) and online pledges

PSP shows its true colours

Sony had already shown what its PlayStation Portable (PSP) looked like and, at the Game Developers Conference in March, had also given a (disappointing) taster of what it could do, but expectations were still buoyant – if not perhaps at the levels surrounding Nintendo's DS, due to b unveiled a couple of hours later across town. Just a month prior to E3, we'd been led to believe that Sony wouldn't be shouting about PSP in Los Angeles. How wrong that proved to be. Clearly, the company had discovered that Nintendo would be offering hands-on demonstration of its new handheld at the event, and it prepared a convincing counter by showing a demonstration of its console's media capabilities via sparkling video footage from the new Final Fantasy Advent Children and Spider-Man movies, and, crucially, snippets of action from a splurge of games currently being created on dev kits from London to Tokyo. (See p14 for the full PSP story.)

Talk of PlayStation3 wasn't entirely















Leading the charge on NDS: *Mario Kart DS* and *Metroid Prime: Hunters*. A large part of their appeal will be wireless link-up play

absent at the event: it was announced that the format's Cell CPU would be rolled out late this year as the heart of workstations dedicated to movie studio creatives working in the CGI field. In the future, it was claimed, it will be possible to simply take assets created for rendered sequences in films and slot them into PlayStation3 gamespaces.

It was a typically professional showing from Sony, paving the way for thousands of E3 attendees shuffling along to its E3 booth for a closer look at its new handheld and its upcoming software the following day.

Nintendo's new day

Choosing to show its hand last was Nintendo, at the Hollywood and Highland Complex, just around the corner from Mann's Chinese Theater, one of the most Hollywoody Hollywood locations the company could have chosen for its E3 hooplah. This was the most eagerly anticipated pre-show event of them all.

Of course, it's a tattered old cliché to say that Nintendo has a younger audience than Sony or Microsoft, but, as with most clichés, it's true – or at least it seemed that way judging by the attendees sweating in the mid-morning sun waiting impatiently for the auditorium's single pair of functioning doors to be opened. The dank whiff of American Nintendo fansite writers' testosterone was all around. These young men knew that a new piece of hardware was going to be unveiled inside; they'd heard that there might even be a new *Zelda* game on show, and they were itching to let their whoopings and hollerings be heard.

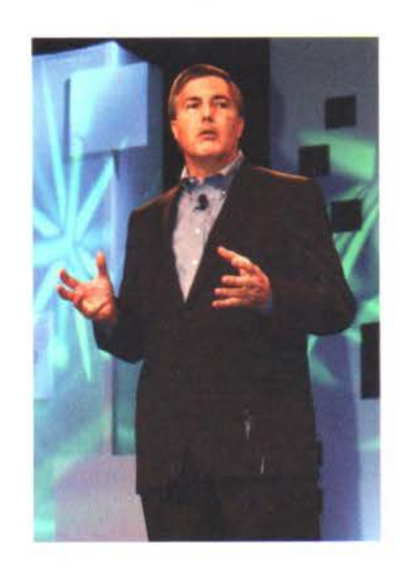
"This is a new day for Nintendo," was the key message from the company's marketing chief **Reggie Fils-Aime**, making a confident first appearance at such an event. Like Microsoft, the company was coming out fighting, emphasising its understanding of what gamers want by showing clips of *Metroid Prime 2: Echoes*, *StarFox* and *Resident Evil 4*, but also its responsibility to cater for gamers of all ages. And then it was on to bashing Sony and Microsoft. "One competitor of ours is a Japanese manufacturer who wants to capture all of your entertainment dollars," Fils-Aime pronounced, "and another one doesn't care what you do as long as you do it on their operating system." And the



Nintendo was giving away NDS styli, replete with glowing-blue lights, to those fortunate enough to get hands-on time with its machine. Naturally, we brought back a handful of them









From far left: Shigeru Miyamoto does his best Link impression for the audience, to a predictably rapturous reception; Satoru Iwata talks of Nintendo's pride at having established so many firsts in gaming, before claiming that NDS is the company's proudest achievement to date; George Harrison focuses on buoyant sales figures while ignoring a persistent heckler; Nintendo new boy Reggie Fils-Aime, who opened his address saying: "My name is Reggie and I'm about kicking ass, I'm about taking names," to much general amusement

The touch-sensitive screen, as demonstrated for us here by at E3 by a friendly Nintendo employee, works like those seen on PDAs. It's not exactly revolutionary, then; the true innovation will be down to game designers





The NDS prototypes didn't seem sleek enough to be typical Nintendo designs, but functionality wasn't an issue. Note the circular shoulder buttons (main)

Nintendo faithful in attendance duly whooped and hollered. Then it was time to show what everyone was waiting for: NDS.

"From the time we announced its codename, you've known these initials to represent the most obvious feature – dual screens," Fils-Aime began. "But that's not what the initials stand for to us. DS has a much larger and more relevant meaning. DS: developer's system. In creating DS we've given the world's most talented game makers new tools to work with, new ways to express their imagination, and of course, in the end, new enjoyment for all of us. The result is this: DS not only changes Nintendo, it changes our industry."

And how would it do that? Fils-Aime went on to explain what the new device was bringing to the table. It obviously has two screens, the lower of which is touch sensitive, via either the supplied stylus or your fingers. It has two 'media bays', aka cartridge slots, one for NDS titles, which will weigh in "with 1Gb of data and beyond," and another for GBA games. It has a built-in microphone, which can be "married to voice recognition programs; that means your voice, and only your voice, can control the play." Finally, it uses a proprietary Nintendo wireless connectivity technology, allowing up to 16 units to communicate with each other over a range of 100 feet. The hardware is also wi-fi compatible.

This last feature sent conference delegates into spasms of excitement. "You can connect [NDS] via the net," intoned Fils-Aime, savouring the reaction. "It's beyond online – it's 'no line'. This machine truly is transformative."

But it was actually showing footage of *Metroid Hunters* running on NDS that turned the venue into a screech-filled zoo – until Fils-Aime made mention of how the game's control system worked. "Targeting and shooting now moves beyond buttons – just tap the screen where you want to fire," he said, and suddenly the whoops turned into a wall of murmured confusion and slight dismay, as if a thousand excitable kids had just had their favourite toys taken away. Fils-Aime pressed on: "The development community already understands what's going on here. I like to think of it like buying a car. Admit it: your left brain looks at the vehicle in terms of the numbers: what's the horsepower? The torque capacity? The 0-60? That's our competitors' approach. But your right brain is different. There's only one question out there: sitting behind the wheel, where will this baby take me? In other words, do you wanna go just a little bit faster down the same streets you've always driven, or down a new road to places you've never seen before? That's the difference with Nintendo DS."

Clearly, this was a reference to Sony's







Sega's NDS contribution was fairly miserable, requiring you to rub the screen back and forth in order to raise Sonic's speed – and that was it. Nintendo's 'Carving Tech Demo' (centre) was a pleasant diversion, and its submarine sim was a good indicator of how the unit's two screens can work in harmony

Nintendo DS software: the first wave

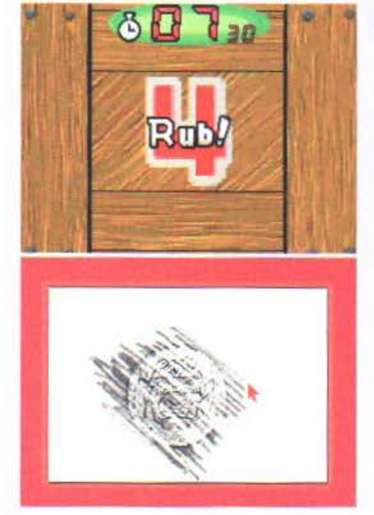
In a rare move for the company, at E3 Nintendo showed a bundle of NDS demos that may not turn into commercial games. However, the seven titles featured here should be finished in time for the machine's late-2004 launch. In terms of showing how the dual-screen concept can work, it's a mixed bag...

Animal Crossing DS



Animal Crossing's letter-sending and pattern-making mechanics are ideally suited to NDS thanks to its touch-sensitive screen, although it's not yet clear how Nintendo will further push the concept. Expect online to figure in there somewhere

Wario Ware Inc DS



An obvious highlight was this third *Ware* outing, requiring you to chop items of food by slicing with your stylus, drag coins into a purse, and reveal a Wario coin as if rubbing over paper with a pencil. The latter was responsible for many scratched screens

Mario Kart DS



Nintendo gave prominence to *Mario Kart* in its marketing materials, although it was suspiciously absent from its stand. Perhaps this was in recognition of its failure to fully utilise two screens. After all, who looks at the map when they're playing *Mario Kart*?

Super Mario 64x4



This was the best demo for appraising NDS's 3D capabilities, since its environment is based directly on *Mario 64*'s opening level. There aren't nearly as many polygons in the scene, and textures are PS1, not N64, in style, but it all moved smoothly enough

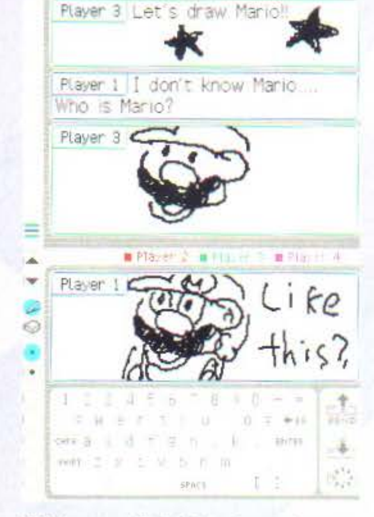
Metroid Prime: Hunters





Hunters was up and running in fourplayer wireless link-up mode, and the results were... interesting. Jabbing the screen with a stylus in order to turn and fire wasn't difficult, just unusual. It can't help but turn into an inter-office cult, though. Can it?

PictoChat



Children are addicted to text messaging, so they will fall in love with *PictoChat*, which allows you to send messages and simple doodles between up to 16 users. Nintendo suggested that it'll be popular in classrooms, although we rather suspect it'll be banned

New Super Mario Bros



NSMB was one of the few NDS games at E3 to use just one of the screens. It wasn't playable, presumably for this very reason

NDS Bomberman and beyond

Also running on NDS consoles in Nintendo's demo rooms were a selection of thirdparty efforts from Japan including *Bomberman* from Hudson and *Pac-Pix* from Namco. The former is a predictable 2D interpretation of the classic (albeit preceded by a 'pumping' subgame involving rapidly moving the stylus left and right on the screen), but Namco's diversion (for you can only call it that) sees you drawing your own Pac-Man, who then animates and chomps away at the ghosts cluttering up the screen. Other attractions included *Pac 'n' Roll* (move Pac-Man around a *Marble Madness*-style environment by controlling his rolling direction on the lower screen), Balloon Trip (guide the descending baby Mario by placing little clouds on-screen), a *Yu-Gi-Oh!* outing from Konami, and *Egg Monster Heroes* from Square-Enix.









Microsoft's stand (top left) was one of the busiest of the show, helped in part by the likes of *Forza* (above), which was running on three screens via five linked Xboxes. And, yes, you'll be able to set it up like this at home. Sony, meanwhile, ensured that its PS2 exclusives were clearly marked (left)

"All of our many advances are now industry standards. All of them make us proud. But I think we are most proud of Nintendo DS"

Gizmondo was on show at E3, albeit only in prototype form, minus its camera functionality. Due for a summer release, the platform is currently left wanting for software support

PSP, which outperforms DS in graphical terms by a serious margin.

Anyone doubting Nintendo's commitment to its new handheld format needed only to listen to Nintendo president **Satoru Iwata**: "Nintendo was proud when we introduced [the D-pad controller] with the NES instead of arcade joysticks. Proud of twoplayer gaming with the NES, and fourplayer gaming on Nintendo 64. Proud of the analogue joystick and the Rumble Pak, and true 3D. We are proud we established portable gaming with GameBoy. All these advances are now industry standards. All make us proud. But I think we are most proud of [Nintendo DS]."

We spent a good few hours with NDS throughout E3, and came away convinced that, with the right software support, it will be a massive hit with the same audience that has predominantly given Nintendo ownership of the handheld market. A new *Pokémon* game taking advantage of the format's wireless connectivity alone will drive millions of sales of the unit, and Nintendo is currently attempting to find a way of exploring all of its key IPs on the format.

Before we left Nintendo's briefing there was time for Shigeru Miyamoto to put in a quick appearance to cue up a video of a new GameCube *Zelda* (see p38). It provoked the biggest single reaction to any game we would see anywhere all week.

More games, more hardware

The Electronic Entertainment Expo itself was awash with new titles like *Donkey Kong: Jungle Beat* (see p41), not-so-new titles such as *Half-Life 2* (p62) and thousands more besides. We think we've rounded up everything worth seeing – the coverage starts on page 33.

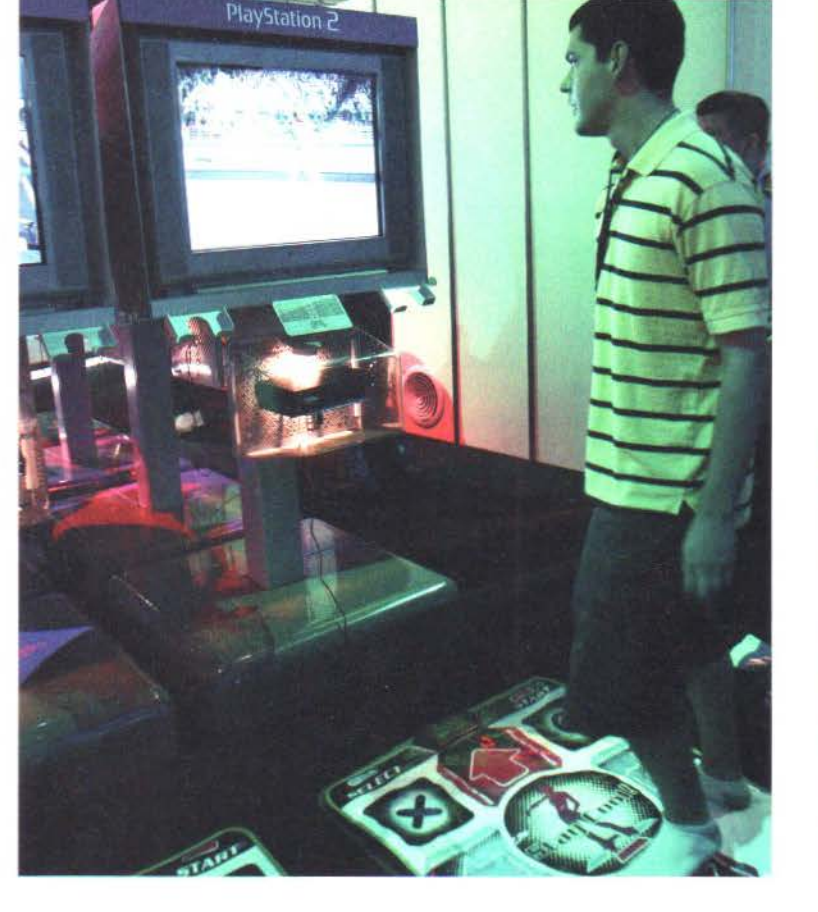
But there was new hardware at E3, too. Infinium Labs surprised everyone by not only setting up an impressively sized stand in one of the main halls, but also showing finished Phantom silicon. The biggest surprise was just how elegant the machine looks – inside it may be simply a vanilla PC skewed towards gaming applications, but externally it is one of the sleekest pieces of 'console' hardware we've seen.

Less immediately glamorous was the purportedly all-singing, all-dancing Gizmondo handheld, which could officially offer only a simplistic puzzle game. We were given a sneak preview of its upcoming gang-warfare title *Colors*, but it was so early that it was impossible to gauge the system's true capabilities. But on paper it still looks interesting, offering a 400MHz ARM9 processor, camera, Bluetooth, SMS compatibility, GPS, GPRS, and a raft of media-handling functions.

Three days of E3 rolled by without too much incident (if you don't count the youth who made off with a beta copy of *Metal Gear Solid 3*, having somehow broken open one of Konami's PS2 demo pods) but an awful lot of glitz, fanfare and, fortunately, no small amount of actual substance, too.

If there was a winner, it was Sony. Or was it Nintendo? Truth be told, every major platform holder had a good E3 this year. What happens at 2005's event will be of more ultimate consequence.







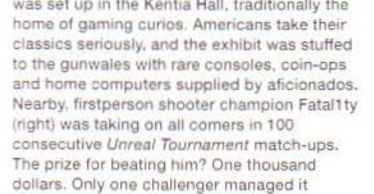
The physical aspect of gaming was notable thanks to Konami's EyeToy-enabled update of *Dance Dance Revolution*. *Athens 2004*'s dance mat compatibility (far left), more EyeToy action with *Sega Superstars* (below), and *EyeToy Anti-Grav*, a *TrickStyle*-esque futuristic racer which tracks the movement of your head and arms. Unfortunately, calibrating the beast proved stupidly difficult, resulting in a most unsatisfactory outing for a novel concept

















To mark E3's tenth anniversary, a retro area was set up in the Kentia Hall, traditionally the home of gaming curios. Americans take their classics seriously, and the exhibit was stuffed to the gunwales with rare consoles, coin-ops and home computers supplied by aficionados. Nearby, firstperson shooter champion Fatal1ty (right) was taking on all comers in 100 consecutive *Unreal Tournament* match-ups. The prize for beating him? One thousand dollars. Only one challenger managed it





Infinium prepared for E3 by placing double-page advertisements in the event's Show Daily publication, challenging attendees to finally see the much-rumoured hardware in fully functioning form on its stand. And it was something of a revelation, not only because of the size of its presence but because the finished hardware looked so sleek (above). The system's joypad may look like any other PC-compatible controller, but the left/right-handed keyboard was surprisingly effective





PlayStation Portable promises power

Amid the insane environment of E3, Sony offers a clear window on the future of handheld digital entertainment – so long as the batteries last...

As forecast last month, E3 2004 was indeed characterised by what was dubbed 'the battle of the handhelds', but that was a tad misleading, since it turned out that Sony and Nintendo are attempting to reach out to two different audiences.

However, though the initial response to PSP's appearance at SCEA's international briefing was muted by comparison to Nintendo's unveiling, when attendees eventually had a chance to see footage running on Sony's machine at close quarters, the gasps were reserved for PlayStation Portable.

Here was an instant design classic some are already ranking alongside Apple's iPod. And then, that screen. The fact that it displays 16.77 million colours at 480x272 resolution means nothing until you actually see it running. All talk of backlighting, frontlighting and other issues has been rendered instantly irrelevant. As one stunned showgoer exclaimed: "You can see the screen from the other side of the fucking hall." The 16:9 aspect ratio, with a diagonal of 4.3 inches, lends the PSP an indisputably contemporary, adult feel, and while 3D game footage on DS looked capable enough, on PSP it approached PS2 quality.

Sony was keen to extol the virtues of PSP's movie playback facilities, running various trailers at the SCEA conference and on its stand at the show. Each one met with murmurs of approval from onlookers.

Yet, sensibly, games were at the very forefront of Sony's thinking, with other capabilities taking a back seat for now. Ninety-nine recognised developers, including virtually all of the world's major console players, already have PSP games in production. EA pledged its allegiance to the PSP by announcing that four of its most acclaimed brands – *NBA* and *NFL Street*, *Tiger Woods PGA Tour* and *Need For Speed: Underground* – would appear in miniature form. Other showreel highlights included *Wipeout Pure*, *Gran Turismo Mobile*, a new *Ridge Racer*, *Ape Escape*, *World Rally Championship* and *Dynasty Warriors*. All looked almost comparable, graphically, to their PS2 counterparts.

The big surprise was the appearance at E3 of *Metal Gear Acid* for PSP, although not in playable form. A turn-based game which saw Snake evading or firing at genome soldiers, it's perhaps not the mobile *MGS* of our dreams, but it demonstrates that PSP is already proving to be a magnet for gaming's biggest – and most profitable – franchises.

If much of the PSP line-up had a rather familiar feel, there were intriguing new IPs in the form of *Zero Hour*, an explosive, urban future shooter from Argonaut, and an as-yet-untitled FPS from Konami which boasted gorgeous space-based environments. Although E3-goers were unable to test PSP's ergonomic qualities on anything more strenuous than Namco's *Tales Of Eternia*, the button layout is logical and comfortable. The revelation is the ridged analogue thumbstick, which appears to provide an enormous degree of movement and control despite being set almost flush to the surface of the console. It's situated a little low on the unit, and this may well suit some but not others.

At 170mm, the PSP console is slightly wider than the original GBA, but almost twice as heavy. Sony's Kaz Hirai declared that the primary audience for the PSP is 18- to 34-year-olds, so presumably Sony feels that this additional weight will not be a problem for adult wrists.

Any colour, so long as it's...

There is no cover as such for PSP, but Sor promises a range of pouches and holsters. The colour of the machine is listed simply a black, but the E3 display also had variation in white, lemon yellow and silver, as well as embossed logos and characters.

Ninety-nine recognised developers, including virtually all of the world's major console players, already have PS Portable games in production

Connectivity is a crucial factor for any portable electronic device nowadays, and PSP incorporates industry-standard IEEE 802.11b Wi-Fi technology, but Sony only hinted at how this might be used. You'll be able to play against other PSP owners in th same room, café or train carriage, up to a range of about 30 metres. Sony didn't officially announce which PSP games woul support multiplayer, but *Gran Turismo 4 Mobile* and *Wipeout Pure* will be among many to utilise local wi-fi play. Game titles such as *Volcanus Online* tell their own story

Sony is adopting an attitude similar to it approach to PS2 online operation by placing the onus on developers, although it may have learned from its experience in thi field where it has allowed Microsoft to occupy the position of developer's friend. The possibilities are tantalising: situated in a wi-fi hotspot, you'll conceivably be able to hook up with other players globally: persistent PSP worlds then become a reality, and if GPS is factored into the equation an extension of the *Uncle Roy* concept is not unfeasible, your actual geographical location becoming part of the game experience. The idea of 'bluejacking' a fellow PSP owner as they enter your rang and challenging them to beat your score or *Tony Hawk's Underground* is a neat one.

Sony fuelled conjecture by displaying a number of prototype PSP peripherals at E3 all connected via USB. A keypad and stylus suggest PDA functionality is being considered, while a number pad featured phone and text symbols. The lack of non-game software on show suggests that Sony won't be pitching the PSP as an

PSP: the games

Every PSP game officially revealed to date

Firstparty US
Syphon Filter: Logan's Shadow
ATV Offroad Fury
Twisted Metal: World Tour
NBA Shootout 2005
NHL Face Off 2005
Fighting Spirits (street-based beat 'em up)

Firstparty Europe
Wipeout Pure
World Rally Championship
Formula One '04
Medievil
This Is Football 2005
Hard Corps (portable version of the PS2 online-compatible title, *Hardware*)

Firstparty Japan
Ape Escape
Dokodemo Issho
Everybody's Golf
Gran Turismo 4 Mobile
Ken No Kagi Shi No Mon (hack 'n' slash title with *Final Fantasy* influences)

Thirdparty US
Death, Jr (cute action platformer from Backbone Entertainment)
Tony Hawk's Underground 2
Spider-Man The Movie 2
NBA Street
NFL Street
Tiger Woods PGA Tour
Need For Speed: Underground
Frogger

Thirdparty Europe
Free Running (from Eidos, based on the rooftop-scaling extreme sport)
Mercury (Archer Maclean's ingenious new puzzler, featuring the eponymous metal)
Metal Shell (desert-based vehicle combat)
Sticky Balls (pool meets *Puzzle Bobble* courtesy of Warthog, from a John Pickford design)
Zero Hour (story-driven, futuristic shooter)

Thirdparty Japan/Korea
Metal Gear Acid (Solid Snake in slightly unusual turn-based outing)
Tales Of Eternia
Darkstalkers Chronicle
Puyo Pop Fever
Dynasty Warriors
Exploration-Based Horror FPS (Konami's working title says it all)
Gagharv (Bandai's 2D RPG)
Ys: Year Of The Ark
New Ridge Racer
Axel Impact International (sleek-looking *Ridge Racer* clone)
BBG (psychedelic rhythm action adventure from Seed9 in Korea)
Crazy Racing Kart Rider (Nexon's cel-shaded kart racer)
Super Star Studio (*Space Channel 5*-style dancing game)
Volcanus Online (stylish mech shooter)
Armored Core Formula Front
Ren-Goku: The Tower Of Purgatory



PSP is dominated by the 4.3-inch widescreen TFT LCD screen. The sleek, minimal aesthetic at work has lead to PSP already being mentioned in the same breath as iPod









N-Gage-style game/phone hybrid, but text and chat functions are a natural evolution of wi-fi, and a camera encouraged talk of photo and video messaging.

Lack of stamina?

The only aspects to temper E3's atmosphere of PSP excitement was talk of battery life and price, and these are factors that have served to see off Game Boy's competitors in the past. On the battery issue, Sony would only officially say that the rechargeable lithium-ion power source would be comparable to other similar devices. According to an SCEA staffer at the E3 stand, that translates as ten hours for gaming, three hours for audio, and just two hours for movies. To some extent, the impetus will be on developers to limit the amount of disc use their game requires. But if the PSP is likely to run out of juice before the end of Troy, then Sony has a problem. It's partly solved by a battery pack, about the size of a business card and 8mm thick, that can be strapped to your wrist. No one could confirm how many hours of playtime this will add, however.

Sony is even less forthcoming about pricing, but the clues are in the 18+ demographic, consistently called the 'iPod generation'. Launching the PSP at less than £200 is unthinkable, and £250 may be nearer the mark. UMD prices are expected to fall in line with that of current games and movies delivered on DVDs.

Both Nintendo and Sony have promised European launches for their machines before the end of the 2004/05 financial year (each will debut in Japan before Christmas) and industry speculators claim that both companies have earmarked the same date – March 18 – for the UK release of their new platforms. The formats' relative positioning will clearly be instrumental to their success.

NDS heralds interesting gameplay innovations, whereas PSP may simply represent the aggregation and refinement of existing technologies. However, it's in suddenly making portable gaming a viable proposition to those who've previously dismissed it (in much the same way millions had no real interest in traditional home gaming until the PlayStation era arrived) that its importance will be felt. Will its multimedia-handling capacity be such a big deal? We'll have to see. As a gaming device, though, it has staggering potential.



This inset shows the comfortable proximity of PSP's digital and analogue directional pads, as well as the concealed Memory Stick slot

Q&A: Phil Harrison, executive vice president of development, Sony Computer Entertainment Europe

How excited are you about PSP compared to other projects you've worked on at Sony?
I'm incredibly excited. It's an entirely new format we're launching here. It is not just a question of taking an existing format and making it a bit faster or adding better graphics or what have you. It's a whole new way of playing. If we get it right, I think PSP has got a chance to be more significant than our TV-based formats – PlayStation1, 2... or 3.

What's the feedback been like so far?
Very strong. I'm really pleased about the way the hardware design and prototype pictures we released a few months back have migrated into the final product with full functionality. It's a really beautiful design, and it's got everybody's attention. The feature that has got everybody doing backflips down the corridor is the quality of the screen. Until you see you see it in context, working, it's hard to describe.

Why is it such a leap from the portable screens we've seen before?
Well, I think it communicates the statement of intent inherent in the platform. Sony wanted to build something for a 21st-century audience that used leading-edge technologies. Other portable hardware formats have tended to raid existing parts bins, using technologies that are prevalent at the time. Our screen is new, custom-made technology. In order to make a great statement with the platform, we needed to achieve a holy trinity of strong CPU power, long battery life and great screen quality. It's taken a while to get there, but I think the results speak for themselves.

You already have 99 developers on board. How aggressively have you courted software support?
Internally, in terms of the European in-house studios, we've been very aggressive. Externally, it's fair to say that the companies we're working with are redoubling their efforts on PSP now that they've seen the response it received at E3. We've got very broad industry support and it's probably a faster uptake than we saw with PS1 and PS2.

Is there a target for the number of titles you want to have on the shelves at launch, or within a year of launch?
No, we've never really looked at it that way. So long as we demonstrate the technical advantages of the format with a number of what we'd call platform defining titles, then that's great – we don't really count it in absolute numbers.

Most of the titles on show at E3 were existing PS2 franchises, and although it was impressive to see games that looked very similar to their PS2 counterparts, there wasn't much of a suggestion of new game ideas being brought to the format...
I think that's understandable, and quite natural at this point in the format's life. Bear in mind that the emulator has not been around for very long and first of all you're going to see games whose development methodology is already understood, or games for which the graphical assets are already available. Having said that, the E3 video did show some new and unique products.

What are you anticipating in terms of new game genres or new ways to play games on PSP?
There are a couple of things. One is the fundamental difference between TV-based gaming and portable gaming. When you're playing at home, you tend to set aside time in advance. Whereas with portable gaming, it's more opportunity driven – you're about to get on a bus and you've got 20 minutes to kill. So we need to encourage developers to invent game ideas that complement this mindset. Secondly, the network play and data-sharing functionality inherent within the format open up all kinds of new possibilities. At first you're talking about multiplayer gaming against people you know, sat in the same room as you. But the proliferation of wi-fi hotspots in cafés, airports and the like means that technically you could be playing your PSP online against anyone in the world, and that's a big deal. Alternatively you have the concept of a physical area – such as a café – where a networked game is taking place in virtual space. People can come and go at any time but the game continues, or you could keep playing the game offline. We'd like to be able to cater for that kind of experience.

Is there anything specific being planned with the first wave of Sony-developed titles?
We're going to be designing additional levels for *Wipeout Pure* that can be downloaded via wi-fi. Hopefully a new track every month after release.

What's the proposed payment model for downloadable content like this?
In this case it will be absorbed by the cost of the game.

How will this content be stored, given PSP's lack of an internal, writeable hard drive, and the fact that UMD is currently a ROM-only format?
On Memory Stick Duo Pro. You can get Memory Sticks which store anything up to 1Gb of memory. But we'll be designing these *Wipeout Pure* tracks so you can store several on a 32Mb stick.

What about the idea of challenging strangers who enter the range of your PSP?
Like bluejacking? Definitely – there are some particular games where you could drive that forward, where your device lets you see other people who could play. These are things that will help take the PSP beyond pure gaming. At some point we'd like to see people texting each other via their PSPs instead of their phones if they happen to be in a wi-fi hotspot, or to send video mail to each other, or to use voiceover IP.

But at the moment you're not risking trying to compete with the mobile phone market.
No, and that's quite simple. Although PSP is a global format and the hardware design will be the same everywhere in the world, there is no global format for mobile phones. Until mobile phone technology gets to that point, we deliberately did not adopt the mobile phone standard into the PSP.



What's the function of the IR port?
It's perfect for lower-bandwidth communications, such as between PSPs or between PSP and another device.

Obviously, you made a big deal at E3 about the movie support you have for PSP. What has been the reaction from









Screenshots from PSP code (from left): *Hard Corps, World Rally Championship, This Is Football, Wipeout Pure, MediEvil, Metal Gear Ac!d, Formula One '04*





various film studios about formatting their movies for UMD?
We've been working hard to allow movies and music to be created very easily on UMD.

So the initial reaction is supportive?
Yes. The music and movie industries want this to succeed because it's a great opportunity.

Do you think people will want to watch entire movies on a PSP?
I think the quality of the screen should mean that people will be happy to watch a whole film on PSP.

Do you expect people who already own a film on DVD to buy it again on UMD?
Depends how much they love the film, I guess! I think there will be a strong rental market, too, just like there is with DVD.

Are movies the main driver for you in terms of video content for PSP, or are you thinking about less wieldy segments of film, such as TV programmes, news, and so on?
I think you could easily imagine a scenario in the future when you're at a wi-fi hotspot selecting the two hours of film content that you want to watch when your plane's in the air, or whatever you want to store on your Memory Stick – which might be a couple of episodes of Little Britain, the Nine O'Clock News and the Bloomberg Financial Report – whatever content is attractive.

Do you think the speed of download is going to be an issue? On current wi-fi connection speeds, how quickly do you envisage that someone could download video content?
It depends on the compression, and also the speed of writing to Memory Stick, so it's a little hard to predict. But it's not going to be so long as to be impractical.

At the moment, downloading a movie, even with a decent broadband connection, obviously takes a while. Can the compression you're planning to use really slash that time?
Yes, and there are advantages to having it on a smaller screen – fewer pixels to display, for example. And for certain types of content I believe the consumer will trade picture quality for higher download speed.

On the music side of things, how are you going to be able to compete with people's existing methods of consumption of digital music, such as iPods and other MP3 players?
Well, there are two aspects to the music functionality on PSP. One is the pre-recorded music on UMD, and the other is downloading music to Memory Stick, and we support a wide range of download formats.

Why doesn't the platform support the MP3 format?
It's the most widespread music compression format, but it's not the best, and it's important that we play to the strengths of the PSP format so that the user gets the best possible audio experience. ATRAC can offer much better quality with a much higher compression rate.

You're talking about going into an area where people own existing devices and have existing systems for getting hold of music. Are you expecting PSP to compete against that, or is the audio functionality really just an extra to it being a games machine?
Once you get used to the idea of music in digital form on your PC hard drive, you don't worry about the format it's in. The PSP is designed to be agnostic as possible, and to be as broadly compatible with industry formats as possible. But, as you might have guessed, games are really the focus for the short term. PSP has unbelievably capable audio functionality, but that's something the music industry has to get their heads round, not just us. It doesn't matter how well we evangelise it, they need to believe it as well. That process is starting now.

Will there be region coding on UMD games and movies?
Unfortunately I can't talk about this yet. [We understand that PSP has been designed as a multiregion device, but that region locks can be enforced within the software or hardware where necessary. It's unlikely that the movie industry will allow for the existence of multiregion movie UMDs, but games could end up being compatible between territories, as with GBA.]

One of the big question marks hanging over the machine – as with any handheld device – is battery life. Are you confident that PSP can function without requiring regular charges, especially given the battery-intensive nature of streaming from disc-based media?
We've said that the battery life of PSP will be comparable with other similar devices available on the market. The issue of how developers deal with the UMD medium will need to be studied once they get final hardware at their fingertips. We'll give guidance to developers once we know what the real metrics are. That's not something of concern at the moment.

Do you know how much extra life will be provided by the battery pack that was on display?
No, I'm afraid not, but I think it was sensible to show that there was such a thing in prototype right from the very beginning.

Are there likely to be alternative colours for the European release?
That hasn't been decided yet. It was interesting to see the response we got to some of the other designs. There was a very strong response to a white one with Japanese iconography on it. Personally, I didn't like the yellow prototype, but a lot of women I spoke to said that that was their favourite. If history is anything to go by, we will probably start with one and then will expand the range once we've caught up with demand.

You're not revealing anything yet so far about unit cost, but do you have any parameters in mind?
No. It's too early to speculate about price – I think we'll announce that at the Tokyo Game Show.

How about software cost?
I expect that our firstparty products will retail for a similar price to that of PS2 games right now.

What do you think about Nintendo's DS? Was the touchscreen function a surprise to you?
It's a surprise in that Nintendo should know better. It's a short-term benefit.

So you're not viewing the DS as competition for PSP?
It's a very different product, aimed at a very different audience.

Some believe that Nintendo is risking cannibalising its existing GBA audience. What do you think?
I think that you'd have to ask Nintendo that question and try to understand why they appear to have made such a knee-jerk reaction.

You think Nintendo's DS is a knee-jerk reaction to PSP?
I am convinced of it.

Gaming goes on the run

Mixing online players with street runners, Blast Theory's Uncle Roy All Around You is extending the scope of games



Online players move through a 3D map of the game area using an avatar. They can provide help, and hindrance, to street players via SMS – and also have a mission of their own



On the rainy streets of Manchester, the computer game has come to life. Nine street players equipped with GPRS-enabled PDAs are roaming through Chinatown trying to follow the tortuous route being spun out to them by a faceless character known only as Uncle Roy. Help, if it can be called that, is provided by online players. Shielded from the elements in gallery spaces at the Cornerhouse cinema and Urbis museum, they follow the street players via their avatars' positions as shown on a 3D virtual map and can text them advice. The final goal of both sets of players is to find Uncle Roy's office, a physical location in the city matched in the virtual world. Once there, the reason behind the game will become clear. Unbeknown to the street players, however, the online players also have a sub-mission – to get someone to pick up one of the postcards lodged in several different places in the playing area.

Launched in London, and redesigned for the Manchester performance, it's clear that Uncle Roy All Around You is more than just a game

The asymmetry of gameplay occasionally results in competition. Sometimes there aren't enough street players to go round, so they are told to head in conflicting directions. Confusion reigns until they decide who, if anyone, they can trust.

"There's always a proportion of street players who come back spitting blood because someone has been telling them to go the wrong way or has been undermining them," grins **Matt Adams**, one of three co-founders of Blast Theory, the multimedia arts group behind the game, *Uncle Roy All Around You*.

"Coming from a performing arts background, we've always been interested in interacting with an audience," he explains. "What we're trying to create with Uncle Roy is a game constructed around social relationships. In order to do that you have to remove a certain amount of control."

Yet for the majority of players, the experience of playing *Uncle Roy* creates a different set of emotions ranging from paranoia to comfort. Indeed, without giving too much away, completion of the game results in what Adams calls a "social contract" between players. This extends contact outside of the game's timespan, a process which conversely also extends the game into everyday life.

Launched first in London, and redesigned for the Manchester performance, it's clear that *Uncle Roy All Around You* is more than just a game, however. "What's great about *Uncle Roy* is how it spills into real life," Adams enthuses. "Last night, a player was telling us about how a tramp started jumping up and down outside the phone box he was in, shouting 'Fuck off'. He wanted to know whether that was part of the game."

And that, for Blast Theory, is the potential of *Uncle Roy*. "With MMOGs, people are happy to be an orc or a member of special forces," says Adams. "But there are opportunities to take games in different directions, maybe in ways that are more familiar to people from literature or cinema." Other possibilities include augmenting existing reality-based genres. "Can you imagine merging this with *The Getaway*?" Adams asks.

The next performance of *Uncle Roy All Around You* will take place on the streets of West Bromwich during the first week of June. Find details at the website: www.uncleroyallaroundyou.com





Equipped with a PDA, street players have to find their way to Uncle Roy's hidden office with clues provided by the mysterious Roy, as well as help from the online players

EIGF award nominees revealed

Voting opens via SMS and internet for the Edge People's Choice award at the upcoming Edinburgh Games Festival

As announced in **E**137, **Edge** has nominated ten outstanding games from the last 12 months for this year's Edinburgh International Game Festival. There are two awards – one voted for by a panel of industry experts, and a People's Choice award, voted by **Edge** readers and visitors to Go Play Games, where all nominees will be available to play (subject to age restrictions).

To get involved, either visit us at www.edge-online.com or follow the instructions below to vote for your favoured candidate by SMS. Voting will remain open until the conclusion of EIGF04 on August 22.

Send all text messages to 83130

- For *EyeToy Play*, send the words VOTE EYETOY
- For *Project Gotham Racing 2*, send the words VOTE GOTHAM
- For *Katamari Damacy*, send the words VOTE KATAMARI
- For *Manhunt*, send the words VOTE MANHUNT
- For *In Memoriam*, send the words VOTE MEMORIAM
- For *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time*, send the words VOTE PERSIA
- For *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow*, send the words VOTE SPLINTER
- For *Four Swords+*, send the words VOTE SWORDS
- For *Viewtiful Joe*, send the words VOTE VIEWTIFUL
- For *Made In Wario*, send the words VOTE WARIO

Text messages cost 25p inc VAT plus your normal text cost. Promotion open to UK residents only. All votes must be received by midnight on 22/08/04. Entrants must not be an employee, agent or subcontractor of the promoter, or a relative of any of those persons. The promoter is Future Publishing Limited, Beauford Court, 30 Monmouth St, Bath, Avon, BA1 2BW. Company no.: 02008885.

The members of **Edge**'s panel are:

- Charles Cecil, co-founder of Revolution Studios and director of *Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon*.
- Michael de Plater, executive producer at Creative Assembly, developer of the *Total War* series.
- Martin de Ronde, commercial director of Guerrilla, home of *ShellShock: Nam '67* and *Killzone*.
- Neil Young, creator of *Majestic* and recently appointed general manager of Maxis, developer of *The Sims*.
- Laralyn McWilliams, lead designer of *Full Spectrum Warrior*, now working with Edge of Reality.
- Gonzalo Frasca, games researcher at the Copenhagen IT University and co-founder of Powerful Robot studios.
- Ray Muzyka, co-founder of BioWare and executive producer of *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*.
- Koji Aizawa, editor in chief, Famitsu PS2 magazine.



For more information on EIGF04, and to register for game screenings and Go Play Games, visit http://www.eigf.co.uk/

Recently reviewed

A rundown of last issue's review scores

Title	Platform	Publisher	Developer	Score
Galleon	Xbox	SCi	Confounding Factor	7
Red Dead Revolver	PS2, Xbox	Rockstar	Rockstar San Diego	8
Resident Evil: Outbreak	PS2	Capcom	In-house	5
Hitman Contracts	PC, PS2, Xbox	Eidos	IO Interactive	7
Powerdrome	PS2, Xbox	Evolved	Argonaut Sheffield	7
Painkiller	PC	Dreamcatcher	People Can Fly	5
The Suffering	PS2, Xbox	Midway	Surreal Software	6
Steel Battalion: Line Of Contact	Xbox	Capcom	Nude Maker	8
SingStar	PS2	SCEE	London Studio	8
Serious Sam: Next Encounter	GC, PS2	Take 2	Climax	7
Seven Samurai 20XX	PS2	Sammy	Dimps	2
Armored Core Nexus	PS2	From Software	In-house	8
RalliSport Challenge 2	Xbox	Microsoft Game Studios	DICE	6
Singles: Flirt Up Your Life	PC	Koch	Deep Silver	4



Galleon




Red Dead Revolver



Resident Evil: Outbreak



Hitman Contracts

CUTTINGS



Dare to be Digital has announced the six contenders for this year's prize, which rewards Scottish students for innovative and commercially viable game designs.

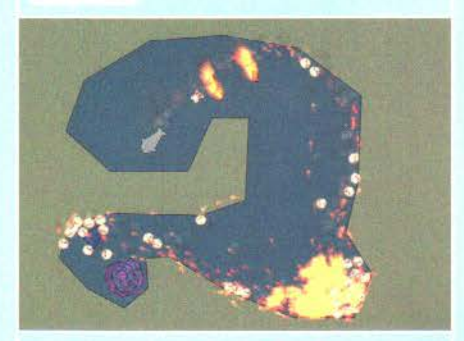
The teams behind the shortlisted games – *Just Add Water*, a team-based puzzler; *Fizzle*, a minigame-based party game; *City Scrawlaz*, a 2D graffiti game; *Nano Agent*, an FPS; *Pixie Dust*, an escort-mission-style platformer and *Blue Moon Rising*, a coop survival horror game – will have ten paid weeks to work on their ideas. The winners will be awarded £4,000, and be given support to help develop the prototype into a commercial reality. Take a look at www.daretobedigital.com to see how last year's winner *Demon Lore* (above) is doing.

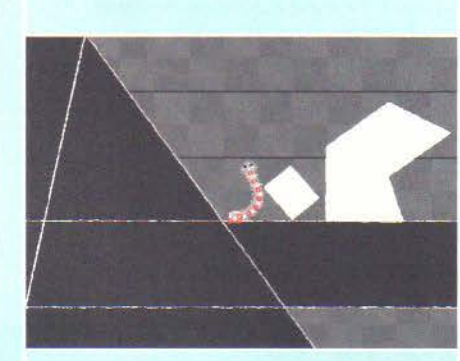
Jason Hall, senior vice president at Warner Brothers, has revealed the company intends to fine licensee publishers if games made from its IP fail to receive an average critical rating of above 70 per cent, as calculated on sites such as GameRankings. Talking to The Hollywood Reporter, he said it was a move to prevent inferior products.

There have been furious responses from the industry, notably from Atari chairman and CEO **Bruno Bonell**. "We sold four million copies [of *Enter the Matrix*]. That's $250million worldwide," he declared. "Warner Brothers would penalise us because we didn't achieve 70 per cent? Are they joking?" The irony is it's likely Warner's intention is to prevent the kind of hype-over-substance embarrassment that characterised *Enter The Matrix*'s release.

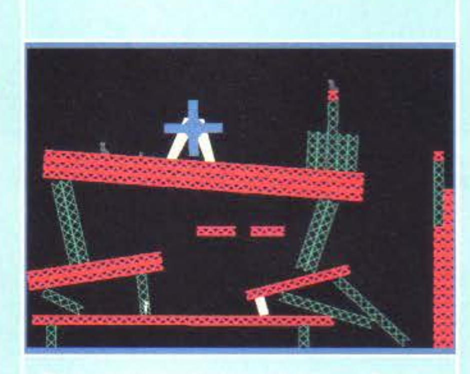
OUT THERE

REPORTAGE













01 Rad gravity

US: The theme of Indie Game Jam 2 (actually the third instalment of the game design festival, thanks to a rather geek-centric numbering system) was Physics in Gameplay, something we've been espousing the virtues of since, well, since Smith and Irvin's marvellous *Exile*. It's reassuring, then, that all the competition's entrants showed why real-life dynamics offer so many gaming possibilities. Since space here is limited, we recommend you visit www.indiegamejam.com to experience them all for yourself, but allow us to present some highlights.

Stunt Hamsters is *Lemmings* written with cannons and pyrotechnics, *Ebi Flip* is what Matsuura might have designed if he was more interested in physics than music, and *Sleep Wit' Da Fishes* is a macabre take on mob body disposal. With anvils. Most interesting to **Edge** readers, though, may be *BootLooter*. It's essentially an 8bit single-screen platform game along the lines of *Manic Miner*, except with real physics, and demonstrates just how modern hardware can introduce new ideas to old dynamics in a way much more fundamental than pure aesthetics.

02 Acclaim's double trouble

US: If you're a long-time fan of Acclaim's Mary-Kate and Ashley series of videogames – including *Girls' Night Out*, *Dance Party Of The Century* and the magnificent *Crush Course* – you'll be surprised to hear that the super-rich franchise queens have launched a lawsuit against the software publisher. As well as accusing them of withholding royalties to the tune of $177,966.32, the suit also claims Acclaim has 'blatantly abandoned the Mary-Kate and Ashley brand, and has taken the Mary-Kate and Ashley brand in videogames which had flourished and has now run it into the ground'. The final straw appears to have the cancellation of *Mary-Kate And Ashley In ACTION!* which we admit we haven't researched (although typing it into Google might be fun), but speculate it's a firstperson shooter with elements of shopping and romance. Actually, thinking about it, it's a shame they didn't lend their name to a *Virtual On* game. Why? Twin sticks, of course, twin sticks.

Soundbytes

"This summer we're sending game fans on a first-class trip to Mars – with a layover in Hell"
id's Todd Hollenshead reveals the company's marketing plans for *Doom 3*. Space and eternal damnation. Excellent

"A brutal encounter with Dr No costs the player an eye, but Goldfinger's technicians replace it with a gold-hued, synthetic eye, earning the player the name 'GoldenEye'"
EA explains the tortuous rationale behind its *GoldenEye* sequel

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for retro gaming fans to purchase a piece of gaming history. I have no idea what is on these discs, or even if they work after 20 years in storage, so it's a bit of a lottery; but a good way to raise some money for charity nonetheless"
Stuart Fotheringham, co-developer of *Miner Willy Meets The Taxman*, explains the rationale behind auctioning the game's recently uncovered 5-inch dev discs on eBay for charity

Paddle royale

US: Atari might have had more comebacks than Tom Jones and George Foreman put together, and the brand label might currently carry a cachet of cool similar to, say, Infogrames, but its latest reincarnation should still attract some interest from long-serving game fans. Jaxx Pacific is soon to release another TV Games unit, but this time in the shape of a paddle, meaning those who still aren't sick of *Pong*, *Breakout* and, yes, *Super Breakout*, can experience them again in the way nature (Nolan?) intended. Out this summer, the device also contains classics like *Night Driver*, *Warlords*, and *Canyon Bomber*, and comes in two flavours: single and multiplayer.

We want to be Clyde

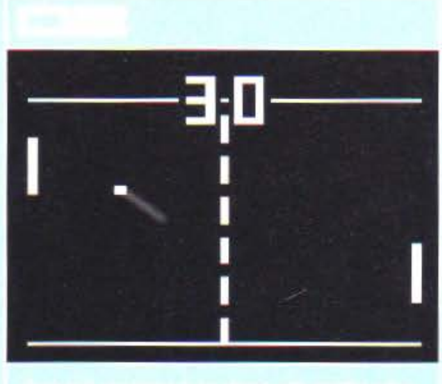
US: Far be it from us to recommend doing pills in New York as a method of recreation, but some things are too entertaining not to promote. Pac-Manhattan, a large-scale urban game that recreates *Pac-Man* in New York, is the creation of students in NYU's interactive telecommunications program, and promises to be substantially more exhausting than your typical arcade workout. The player dressed as Pac-Man runs through the streets, consuming virtual dots under the guidance of a player back in the control room. The four players dressed as Inky, Binky, Pinky and Clyde, also guided by their four analogues in the control room, run around the streets trying to catch Pac. 'MSO' is leading the score table with 2,230 (achieved in 42 minutes), although the flight costs alone in attempting to beat that will cost most **Edge** readers substantially more than a quarter. Still, though the US street/avenue grid system lends itself particularly well to the project, there's a chance you'll soon be able to play somewhat closer to home. The Pac-Manhattan team is currently developing a kit which will allow players to play the game in their own city, and those interested should join the mailing list at www.pacmanhattan.com

Buckle up

US: You'll never catch us with our pants down. However, if we were to have a problem with our trousers coming off, then our first port of call would be www.nesbuckle.com, a site that sells NES controllers refitted as belt buckles. It assures buyers that the buckles are 'made with metal parts that will keep those pants nice and tight', and at $15 a pop you'd certainly hope so. But maybe that's a worthwhile investment for that just-buckled look. Is it geek chic? We can't tell any more, but there's a natty Link trucker cap on sale there, too.

Data Stream E3 2004

Number of games at E3: **Nearly 5,000**
For consoles: **40.3 per cent**
For PCs: **30.7 per cent**
For handheld gaming devices: **6.8 per cent**
For PDAs, wireless phones, etc: **18.4 per cent**
Online or internet games: **3.8 per cent**
Action/adventure games: **26.6 per cent**
Educational games: **15.8 per cent**
Sports/racing games: **12.5 per cent**
RPGs: **7.3 per cent**
Strategy games: **3.7 per cent**
Number of these games never seen before: **1,000**





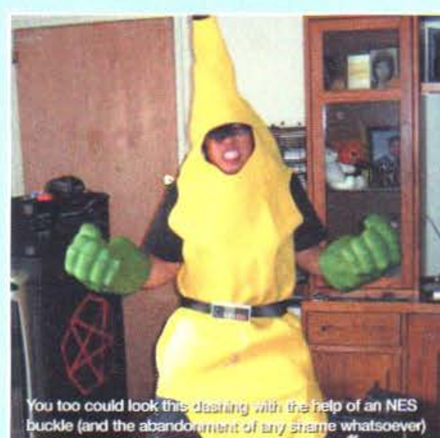












You too could look this dashing with the help of an NES buckle (and the abandonment of any shame whatsoever)





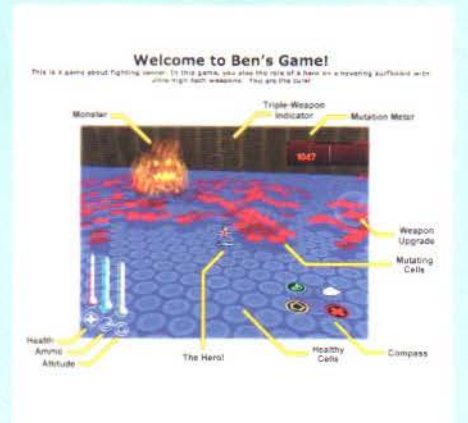












06 GBA bit faster

US: Similar to the Xbox speed modification featured in **Edge** some months ago, GBAccelerator is an internal GBA mod that allows the user to play games at up to twice the speed. While th might seem something of a spurious modification at first, it's aimed at those who use the system for homebrew development and, in particular, emulation. A modified GBA will be able to play SNES and PC Engine games full speed, a selling point that may convince those who can't wait for the DS and its inevitable homebrew scene. Information about the GBAccelerator is available from www.aheadgames.com, a 'speciality' videogame store that also offers battery light mods for the GBA for the particularly aesthetically conscious, and a speaker amplification mod for those who want to really annoy people nearby.

07 Sweeeeeeet

Japan: Of course, if you really want to irritate your household with Nintendo noise, then you might as well do it properly. Inside each box of MegaHouse's 'Famicom Game Soundtrack Museum Candy Toy' – high five to the kids in marketing for *that* name – is some candy and an 8cm Nintendo-branded CD. Each CD contains the aural pleasure of one classic Famicom game, offering 8bit soundtracks from *Zelda*, *Metroid*, *Mario* and many more. Seventeen more, to be exact, which means those with a complete collection (and of course, you've simply got to catch them all) will also have to have a very, very sweet tooth. Try all the usual importers – Lik Sang, Play Asia – and perhaps book an appointment with your dentist, too.

08 Make-A-Wish gets game

US: Ben Duskin is nine years old and in remission from leukemia, and thanks to the Greater Bay Area Make-A-Wish Foundation is now the star of his own videogame. *Ben's Game* was put together by Eric Johnston of LucasArts, and features the hero on a hoverboard shooting cancer cells with an selection of hi-tech weapons while collecting shields. The game runs on Mac or PC, and a beta can be downloaded from www.makewish.org/ben

Continue

The New Zelda
You really need to see Nintendo's other, secret video
PSP
Strangely reminiscent of Atari's Lynx, but a whole lot slinkier
DS and Wario Ware DS
A convincing demo of how touch-screen gaming can work

Quit

E3 overload
Seven press briefings, 12 parties, 5,000 games. Whoah
Half-Life 2
Out autumn 2003? Yes. Of course
Cel-da
But we hope he returns one day



09 The Confusion

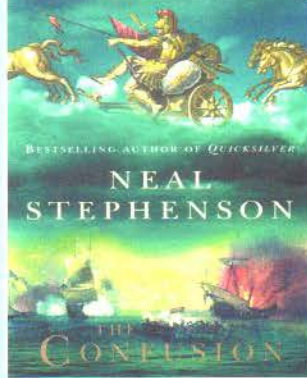
And so to the next 815 pages of Neal Stephenson's 17th century swashbuckling, bodice-ripping historical science faction. Taking up where the opener Quicksilver left off, The Confusion follows the increasingly complex travails of Jack Shaftoe, King of the Vagabonds, and the saucy proto-economist Eliza. Jack's wound up a lowly car slave in Algiers but the good news is his French pox seems to have been cured by a case of some local fever. Not that either complaint, nor his deformed pecker, is likely to slow him down. A mere couple of hundred pages later, he's rounded up a crack team of blades, linguists, planners and traders, stolen a French treasure ship and hotfooted it to Cairo. Life has become more dignified for Eliza, however. Despite being captured on the way to England by the French, the now ennobled Countess de la Zeur manages to keep busy; bedding the King's censor and Jack's brother as well as infatuating the dashing sea captain who now controls her large fortune.

It's captivating stuff, of course, but there's also much more going on beneath the surface gloss. The Confusion's aim is to uncover the shift that occurred when money became divorced from hard commodities such as gold and silver. Without Spain's access to South America's natural resources, England suffered from huge problems with its money supply. It was no coincidence, at least in Stephenson's eyes, that Isaac Newton ended up head of the London Mint; itself the location for the final part of the tale, due in October.

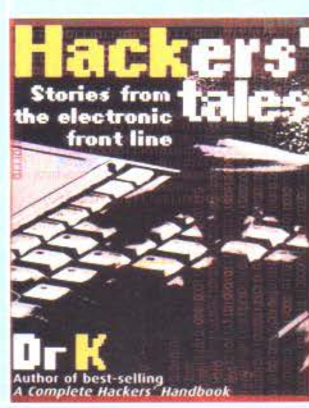
10 Hackers' Tales

Freedom fighters, criminals, destroyers of capitalism, scientists of the cyberworld – can we learn anything new from the mysterious underworld (sic) of hackers? But whatever tired label is used as a description, the problem with this subculture is the obscuration that surrounds it. Ignoring the fact you need to be a hacker to understand how the clever tricks of the trade work, public debate on the subject seems to hamstrung by extremes. According to personal preference, hackers are either the final menace to western civilisation or the ultimate postmodern seekers of truth. And it's against such stereotypes that the somewhat predisposing Hackers' Tales comes good. A rather niggledy collection of verbatim interviews with 20-odd anonymous hackers, it peels back some of the confusion, allowing the general reader to get a better idea of what drives the individual hacker's enthusiasm. And there are certainly some strange cases. There's the social engineer who always carries a clown's nose as a prop for ice breaking or persuading the police he's harmless. Another, the only Christian hacker on the scene, claims he's taken a lot of the philosophy of hacking into his religious experience. Interestingly, a lot of the older hackers do have strong ethical debates about what they should and should not do with their power. Typically, there are also an inordinate number of younger kids who are less circumspect. But the one thing that seems to link them all is a passion to see how things work. And, lurid headlines and issues of legality aside, there are plenty of worse vices in life to fall foul of.

Author: Neal Stephenson
Publisher: William Heinemann
ISBN: 0 434 00878 8



Author: Dr K
Publisher: Carlton
ISBN: 1 84442 809 5





Site: **Arcade Flyer Archive**
URL: **www.arcadeflyers.com**

11 Website of the month

The Arcade Flyer Archive is a huge repository of flyers for arcade games, one-sheet promotional pieces used to pitch the machines to would-be buyers. Each flyer is scanned at high resolution then thumbnailed, and the website's clean, simple interface makes it a nostalgic pleasure to browse through classics and obscure titles alike. On a more intellectual historical note, the industry is nearly three decades old and it's absolutely absorbing to see how the marketeers' illustrative style has evolved alongside the technology it promotes. Interestingly, since the site covers flyers from across the globe, it's possible to compare game art across continents, too.

Advertainment

This Japanese advert for *Katamari Damacy* (8/10, E136) is set in an office building, with a salaryman waiting, apparently, for a job interview. Little does the employer know, however, that its prospective worker has curious adhesive qualities…



After a glimpse of the PS2 logo, a woman enters and asks the seated man to accompany her to the office



Rather than simply walking , Mr Yoshida decides to roll his way there stuck to a sofa, and then another



The secretary waits calmly as Yoshida demonstrates his new upholstered method for picking up ladies



A male voice says: "Make it roll, and it gets bigger!" followed by "*Katamari Damacy*" and "PlayStation"



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

The geeks who got lucky

If you've never been lucky enough to go to EA's UK headquarters in Chertsey, let RedEye paint a picture. It's a lovely glass building next to a still glass lake, a glassy business park in the middle of glassy nowhere. Employees amble amiably around the lobby. It all seems pleasant enough, until you look into their eyes and realise they are as glassy as the ambience. "You're one of us now, RedEye," they collectively monotone, moving forward, clutching folders of endless paperwork. "Join us." and they advance, and RedEye makes a break for it, through the glass doors, across the glass fields that lead nowhere, nowhere, but he is chased by stretchy glass bubbles that will inevitably catch him and imprison him for ever and ever...

Prisoner? Referencing super-geek sci-fi this early in a column? You're probably wondering how RedEye can get away with doing that while still maintaining his insouciant cool. In fact, you're probably thinking he can't. You're wrong. If it helps, he's only copying the reference from The Simpsons. Yeah, that's it. RedEye likes cool new programmes, like, uh, I Want A Famous Face, and Pimp My Ride. And Newlyweds. Jessica Simpson sure is hot.

Oh god. Now he's trying too hard. No, seriously, RedEye's cool. He is so down with you. Please let him be down.

Like anything else, cool is relative. As RedEye writes, a press release arrives from UbiSoft, announcing *Notorious: Die To Drive* which promises 'attitude, gangsta rap, bling (lots of) and gangs driving around in their cars shooting at – well, everyone and everything'. How gangsta are the people involved? Did they do research trips to Compton? Get tips from Suge Knight? Just how gangsta is the person who wrote the release? *Totally* gangsta, RedEye hopes, although perhaps they're as gangsta as Megatree, the people who designed *Gangsta Wars*, a rip-off of *Dope Wars* released for mobile phones. Its web page announces: 'Oi Jigga, there's a fifty-grand price on your head, blud!' RedEye, cringing, goes back to being cool. Relatively speaking, of course.

So. Electronic Arts. It is an Industry Truth that EA has undergone something of a renaissance. That franchises like *SSX* and *LOTR* represent a new EA that seeks not just to repackage old ideas but to bring Quality Gaming Experiences to the market, to innovate and entertain across all demographics. Like all Truths, this one is built on secrets. The biggest secret here is that EA is perhaps no better or worse than it's always been.

Though gloomy nostalgics will cite EA's entire softography as *FIFA '9X* through '05, they forget there were plenty of highlights: *Syndicate*, *Desert Strike*, *Command and Conquer*, *NHL '95*. Each was devalued by a succession of sequels, but that's the EA way. It's a company built on making every last dollar out of success, minimal cost for maximal profit.

This is good business sense. Consumers, however much the charts suggest it, don't like to buy the same game over and over again. It's also bad for gaming's image, as non-gamers will think all games are the same if those they see are built from the same engine, on the same principles, to the same end.

Too many people in the games industry refuse to think in the long term – it's all about short-term greed. It was that greed that killed the Bond game. EA took all the goodwill generated by *GoldenEye*, and shot it away in a handful of soulless Bond games. Now the brand is all but meaningless again it's making *GoldenEye: Rogue Agent*. RedEye isn't sure if you saw the pitch, but he's not going to repeat it. It's too comical. He'd never be able to reproduce the desperation or clumsiness.

People cite *The Sims* as an example of EA's market-savvy approach, but insiders know that that isn't the case at all, that EA got lucky. It had absolutely no idea what it had until after Will Wright had pushed his snowball a little way down the hill. Don't believe RedEye? Look at those huge cover previews in market-leading PC games mags that predate the game's release. Can't find them? They don't exist. Even now Electronic Arts is failing to take advantage. It may have sucessfully stalled the userbase with add-on packs, but people will not buy those forever. Worse, there is no guarantee the publisher will be able to persuade them to upgrade to *The Sims 2* any more than transfer to that spectacular failure *The Sims Online*.

And now it brings on *The Urbz*.

The Urbz looks bad. So bad, in fact, RedEye swore it was an April fool, some sort of internerd rumour. But no, there it is on EA's website: a concept so embarrassing it manages to out-stupefy its own brand name, a name which scores an almost unprecedented 9.8 on the stupid-o-meter.

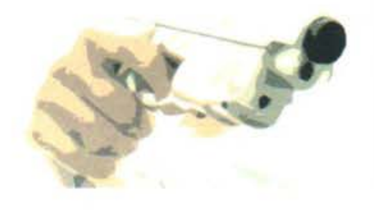
The Z at the end should give you a clue: it's an attempt at a street version of *The Sims*. Needless to say, it's not so street. It's Prince Charles chatting to Jay-Z, it's a Tory MP dressed as Ali G, it's your dad telling you he likes hip-hop and that it has a good beat. It's the sex ed lessons you had as a kid, when the teacher came round the front of the desk and half-sat on it to show that everything was cool. It's not cool, but it wants to be, because that's where the money is.

It's Prince Charles chatting to Jay-Z, it's a Tory MP dressed as Ali G, it's your dad telling you he likes hip-hop and that it has a good beat

Perhaps EA is counting on The Kids being fooled, but never, ever underestimate the intelligence of The Kids. They are smarter than you or I, and one day they will rule the world. The only kids who will own *The Urbz* will be the ones who get beaten up at school, the ones who had no problems with *The Sims* in the first place. Some say the company's position in the market is impregnable, but perhaps the re-reevaluation of EA should begin here.

Is the firm made up of masterminds? Business genii? Geeks who got lucky? No. It's like its beautiful headquarters: all glass, no soul.

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge**'s*



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

When academics play games. Or don't...

Occasionally I like to go on safari, well slathered with mosquito cream and toting a rifle, through the peculiar jungle that is academic writing about videogames. Partly, this is to ensure I don't disappear any further up my own arse than might already be imagined by certain **Edge** readers, partly out of curiosity, and partly for the strange mix of fascination and incredulity that washes over me when I read a lot of this stuff.

Here, for example, at gamestudies.org, is a paper by Laurie Taylor called When Seams Fall Apart: Video Game Space And The Player, in which the author's combative opening gambit is to accuse me, along with two other authors, in a tone of patronising distaste, of naively assuming 'the absolute authority of a rational scientific order'.

Failing quite to remember where I said this, I nonetheless do not wish to dissociate myself from such an assumption. I do think 'rational' science is the most authoritative mode of discourse about the world, assuming that by authoritative we mean things like predictably accurate, provably useful, the kind of authority that ensures my kettle boils when I want some coffee, that sort of thing.

The trouble is that everywhere in today's academic world, except (for obvious reasons) inside science departments, to say such a thing marks one out as a feckless reactionary throwback, as someone imprisoned in an imperialist and probably phallocentric Enlightenment mode of thinking, certainly someone who has not read enough Lyotard, Baudrillard, Derrida and so on. Now, I have read and admired much of these authors, but it pays to keep one's sceptical hat on when they veer into the realms of science, as documented by the book Intellectual Impostures (which seems to me about half-right, given that at least half the time the writers under attack are working explicitly in the realm of evocative metaphor, the usefulness of which the hard-headed scientific authors simply don't appear to understand).

Let us get back to Laurie Taylor, who is researching 'interface issues and survival horror games' (good luck!) for her PhD. What does she propose we embrace in place of her despised 'rational scientific order'? Why, an irrational one, of course: the key to her conception of videogame space will be 'the concepts of Lacanian psychoanalysis'. Let us remember that Jacques Lacan is a man who proposed, in all pompous seriousness, that i, or the square root of -1, is equivalent to the penis. Got that? The rest of the paper talks about the 'mirror stage', 'narcissistic projection' and 'the gaze', and is led by these borrowed concepts to end up saying this:

'Taking in my own actions does not allow me to pass through the screen, but only to act on the screen because the screen acts as a divider until I can find a way into the game space – a way which an active image provides for and which an icon in a control panel does not. Essentially, from a position alone the player cannot enter into the game space as part of that game space because of the lack of context which embodiment, in thirdperson point-of-view games, provides.'

This appears to mean that firstperson games are less immersive than thirdperson games. Now this in itself is an intriguing position, because many of us, I suspect, will instantly disagree with it. Do we not feel more *there*, more *in* the game space, when we play *Halo* as opposed to *Brute Force*?

Jacques Lacan is a man who proposed, in all pompous seriousness, that i, or the square root of -1, is equivalent to the penis. Got that?

Perhaps. On the other hand, perhaps we feel a greater sense of physical identification when we are commanding a thirdperson character such as in *Prince Of Persia*. It seems to me that Taylor is confusing two concepts: those of spatial immersion and character identification. As I argued in my very first **Edge** column, character identification only really works in thirdperson games, you cannot 'become' a character you rarely actually see, but the firstperson viewpoint provides a greater sense of being there, as cannot be doubted if you watch the physical head duckings and leanings of an FPS player. Herein lies the unfortunate nature of much academic writing about videogames: fashionable concepts are roped in to a simplistic argument, and tend to pervert it towards a conclusion that lacks credibility according to the ordinary experience of gamers. It is also too often the case that academic game researchers do not spend a lot of time playing games. It seems weird for Taylor to complain that, when one is attacked by monkeys in *System Shock 2*, 'one cannot see or fight the monkeys without manually changing view to look down', as though this were a considerable effort.

But the most compelling evidence for the prosecution is that her main exhibit is *The X-Files Game* from 1998, in which she perceives her cherished rupture in the firstperson game-space (when your character looks in the mirror). When she says: 'This is how most firstperson point-of-view games operate, by allowing the player to function *on* the space, but not *within* the space', she is actually thinking of point 'n' click adventures such as *The X-Files Game* or *Myst*, and fondly imagining – in an article published in 2003 – that this nearly-extinct style actually constitutes 'most' firstperson games. Of course, in a point 'n' clicker, the player functions 'on' the space, but to extend this argument to real FPSs like *System Shock 2* and *Call Of Duty* is patently absurd, and this blunder torpedoes her entire argument. I do not mean to imply that I think all academic research into videogames is worthless. It is doubtless a worthwhile project to conduct psychological investigations into the mechanism of projection and immersion in the videogame space (except that for Taylor, 'cognitive-psychological' research would fall under the rubric of her dreaded 'rational scientific order'). There are doubtless numerous other sub-fields in which the approach of an academic can yield conceptual rewards, but we need fewer academics who seek to armour themselves in the borrowed authority of postmodern jargon, and more – for positive examples, look up the work of Jesper Juul or Kurt Squire – who are passionate, intelligent gamers.

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: steven_poole@mac.com

A worrying wind is blowing over Japan these days. At first it looked very alien to the games industry, but as things developed in my country, I start to fear for the medium- or long-term consequences.

First things first. You may already know, but Japan is involved in Iraq, part of the coalition occupying the country under US command. And lately everybody is focused on the three Japanese who have been abducted near Fahluja. The reason is simple. The people who abducted these three people want to force the Japanese government into withdrawing its troops from Iraq.

In Japan we have an army, but it is not like many others: it is designed just for defensive purposes. It's there just to defend our country, Japan. This is the very first time it has gone out of our borders for an operation which is not under the UN mandate. Anyway, our government used every means possible to have its three citizens freed. When the deadline set by the 'rebels' passed, the government maintained it would not withdraw its troops, so the tension in Japan rose as people were expecting a deadly end to the crisis. But, thank God, they have since been released, unharmed, and they have been repatriated to Japan safely.

But this is where things got worse.

As you may expect, these three former hostages gave interviews when they arrived in Japan. Their comments were quite positive even after such traumatic experience: "That can't make me hate Iraq;" "I would like to go back;" "I'm delighted that I have been freed, but I don't think Iraqis are to be blamed for what happened." These three people are a journalist, a peace activist and a member of an NGO (non-governmental organisation) looking at human rights, so their comments were not that surprising. However, this triggered a 'bashing' movement against them: the government and a part of the public were displeased about these comments. Don't forget that in Japan we are not very used to these situations.

"What the hell are they thinking? Why would they go back to that country after what happened?" people said. "Are they nuts? They knew that Iraq was a dangerous destination to go to. Why did they go in the first place? Do they realise how much money has been spent in getting them back home? What kind of comments are these?" The families of these three people suffered numerous anonymous calls. The situation was going out of control.

The worst was about to come, with the prime minister, Junichiro Koizumi, getting involved in the 'debate'. "I would like them [the people who have been rescued] to think about their personal responsibility in all of this," he said. The head of state was officially taking a position against these three released hostages, and this fuelled the bashing movement against them even more! The prime minister was clearly telling the public that these three people were out of their mind. To be honest, I became quite worried about the course of these events.

I can't understand these things being said to them. I mean, it's a journalist and an NGO worker, and they clearly knew how dangerous Iraq was when they decided to go there. The war was clearly not over. They knew, and they went to Iraq, spontaneously. At this level, they were already fully aware of their personal responsibility in putting their lives in danger. So why do people need to bash them so much? There is no meaning in this, and we should have welcomed them back warmly. The government has no right in telling people where they can or can't go, what they can or can't see, etc. I mean, they are independent – the government has no control over them. Well, not yet, at least...

They are Japanese citizens and should be protected by their country no matter when they are in danger. This is what the government stands for, no? The timing of these comments was just inappropriate after we went through such drama during their captivity. Everybody was relieved to see them released safely and they just tell us that they want to go back...

Anyway, it is like a couple. They have some argument or other but in the end they love each other very much, no matter what. It looks just like this. However, people outside of the couple may not understand the relationship, and have a different view of the situation.

But the damage has already been done, and something worrying has been triggered. The point is that I fear guidelines are being set in our society, and that videogames could well be one of the very next targets. I fear that some kind of 'videogame bashing' movement is around the corner.

You know about incidents implicating videogames – someone commits a crime and gives videogames as an excuse, or even claims they are the main reason behind their actions. Game content is becoming more mature, and it's targeting older users. In the case of crimes supposedly inspired by a videogame, does the responsibility lay with the maker of the game, or is it the responsibility of the user? This dilemma is still very real, and remains unsolved.





AV OUT

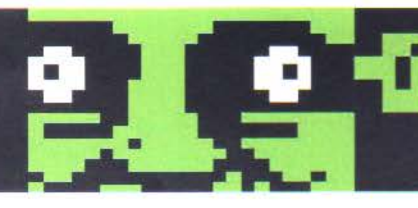
Toshihiro Nagoshi

Personal responsibility

It is difficult to put the blame on to one side rather than the other, and I think both should share it in a more constructive way. Gamers know it is not reality displayed inside the game. Take a 'normal' user: he goes to the shop, buys a game, and plays it. The process is clear. He buys a piece of entertainment to enjoy in a short moment of his everyday life. Why should he switch that content in place of his reality? I mean, why should he reproduce it in real life? Keeping in mind the fact that a game is a game, and nothing about it is real, is the personal responsibility of users. Having said that, the game maker has its own personal responsibility in the content it delivers to users. It has to keep the border between games and reality clear. I believe that the personal responsibility is not necessarily located on only one side. It works on all sides.

Something worrying has been triggered. I fear guidelines are being set in our society, and that videogames could be one of the next targets

Toshihiro Nagoshi is general manager of Sega's Creative Center division. His games include the Super Monkey Ball *series and* Daytona USA



BIFFOVISION

Page 30, press hold, and reveal. 'Digitiser's founder speaks out

Let me tell you a story

Children say the funniest things. You know: "This lolly tastes like you put poison on it," and: "Daddy, why do I have to sleep in the cupboard under the stairs like I'm a mouse?" Such is the gloriously intoxicating innocence of youth.

Recently, I was settled into the sofa for an extended session of *Super Monkey Ball 2*. Two of my 47 daughters, as they often do, settled down at my ankles to patiently await their turn. As they watched the encased simians going about their colourful rolling, they turned to one another.

"Why do you think the monkeys are doing this?" asked one. "What's it meant to be about?"

"It's just about having fun," replied the other.

And how right she was. It may seem glib, but games, by and large, should be about having fun. I wouldn't have to state it if more game developers understood. Story has no place in games – at least, not in arcade-style games (if 'arcade-style' isn't an anachronism these days). It's an unnecessary distraction. Unfortunately, the newest generation of gamers seem to expect games to have a storyline. Even those of us who've been playing for the best part of our lives are becoming brainwashed by the obsession with stories.

Admittedly, there's a certain purpose to the story in, say, RPGs (though I've yet to play one that really gripped me, adhered to traditional story structure or had any great ambition to be original), and adventure games (likewise... they're mostly a justification for a series of logic puzzles). *Jak II* is one of the slickest actioners of recent years. It's a melting pot of gaming styles, and a breeze to pick up and play, but do we really need to know that Jak is 'driven by a burning rage'? That he spent 'two years in a cold, dark, jail cell, subjected to torturous experiments'? Yet it's these facts that are emblazoned on the packaging, above the details of the actual gameplay. If I want a story about someone driven by rage I'll watch Falling Down. Or Taxi Driver. Or, heck, Return Of The poxy Jedi.

Chances are most of you reading this started playing videogames when you were children. When you first played *Donkey Kong* did you need to know Jumpman was a 'tortured plumber, wrongly accused of suffocating a string of beautiful women with banana skins'? Did you need to hear how he 'sets out on a desperate mission to save his beloved, clear his name and capture the real culprit – a maladjusted, genetically engineered super-ape'? Or did you just need to know it was about jumping over barrels to spite the monkey?

Admittedly, not every classic game lacked a plot. *Skool Daze* had a storyline of sorts – get your school report back from the headmaster before you were suspended. And *Ant Attack* was something to do with ants and hand grenades. They were the bare minimum of 'plot' needed to justify the gameplay, and just enough to satisfy those who hammered their fists against *Pac-Man* cabinets, spluttering "Why, whyyyy, whyyyyy...?!?"

There was a time when games didn't have plots, or backstory. There was a time when the people making games weren't trying to be Martin Scorcese, or George Lucas. They were 'merely' trying to make great games. You know – back in the days when the people who did the graft were the ultimate arbiter of what a game was.

This is precisely why the *Sonic Adventure* games got it so painfully wrong. Sonic has never been about stories. When Sega got the series right, it's been about mainlining pure arcade thrills direct into the pleasure centres of the brain. Having your – ahem – intellectual glands stimulated by some sort of pointless plot-thing was just wrong in every single respect, which Sega indirectly admitted by releasing the relatively plotless *Sonic Heroes*. Unfortunately, it also dropped pretty much everything else which ever made the Sonic games fun, but that's another story. For a time, Sega got caught in this industry's absurd preoccupation with telling a story.

There was a time when the people making games weren't trying to be Scorcese, or George Lucas. They were 'merely' trying to make games

When I was working on the story for ZedTwo's *Pillage* (or *Future Tactics: The Uprising*, or whatever it's called these days), it was borne out of a gameplay conceit set by the creators: none of the characters could die. I enjoyed the challenge, and was determined to devise an original scenario and world wherein, firstly, none of the player characters could die, yet there was still something at risk. Secondly, create a group of characters the player cared about. Thirdly, tell a story which didn't make you want to skip the cut-scenes and integrated the levels as separate plot beats. And, lastly, send up some of the conventions of gaming by subverting clichés.

Once I began, I could see how easy it was to get carried away and forget you were writing for a game. As somebody who, on the whole, skips cut-scenes, I had to fight my instincts to keep mine to a minimum. Unfortunately, I did get carried away with the plot, and initially went all Arthur C Clarke on ZedTwo's ass. Early drafts struggled to balance characterisation, exposition and brevity. I started to choke on my own ambition, and it took 18 months or so to fish the chicken bone out of my throat.

Were we successful? I don't know. If I was coming to *Pillage* as an outsider, I'm not convinced I wouldn't skip the cut-scenes. I'd like to think I wouldn't enjoy the levels as much if I didn't play through the framing sequences. But, as with most game storylines, I couldn't say the plot is crucial. It may explain the central gameplay premise, but the story is of secondary importance. Which is, at least, something we did get right.

I doubt anything I can say is going to stifle game producers' ambitions as screenwriters. It's just depressing that more aren't confident in their abilities as game creators to focus on gameplay, rather than trying to hide it behind narrative. Perhaps it wouldn't matter as much if more developers were accomplished storytellers. Or if, in the cases of professional storytellers brought in to create the stories for the games, they really understood about games. And before any of you RPG freaks start on the abysmal 'mature' storytelling and themes in the *Final Fantasy* series, I should inform you of two things: I know where you live, and I own a really powerful gun.

Mr Biffo is a semi-retired videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge****'s*



The best of E3 2004

The cream of the show, broken down by format (along with an interview or two with some of gaming's biggest names). It may be an idea to start saving now.

Metroid Prime 2: Echoes

Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **Retro Studios**



Visually, *Echoes* is rather a shock compared to the muted beauty of the first game. The lurid colours combine with the greater detail of the models and environments to create a wonderful nightmare

Samus Aran's protracted run-ins with the Space Pirates take a back seat in *Echoes*, as the real villains of the piece are a sinister race that live on the shady side of a planet split into light and dark worlds by some cosmic cataclysm.

The dark Ing are engaged in a struggle for power with their light counterparts, the Luminoth, and Samus is the woman who can – in theory – prevent a total meltdown when the two worlds collide.

In the carefully engineered E3 demo, we stepped into the heart of the dark world, breezing past Space Pirates on the way to a showdown with Samus' own dark half. New light and dark beam weapons showcased the game's coherent duality – light weapons will make things grow in the light world or die in the dark place, so selecting the correct tools is of far more importance than in the original *Metroid Prime*. To force players to take the difficult step of choosing something other than a trusted favourite, Retro Studios has opted to give each beam weapon a limited supply of ammo.

The lock-on control system remains unchanged, and the graphics have taken a significant turn for the better, with increased detail on objects, characters and environments. The Ing themselves manifest as purple-bordered puddles of oozing slime which slide across the walls before solidifying into huge insectoid shadows. You'll recognise their inspiration if you've seen No-Face's demonic transformation in Spirited Away, but it remains a uniquely impressive videogame effect.

Visual effects aside, *Echoes* is notable for the introduction of a multiplayer mode. Up to four can play on a single machine (there's no LAN mode) with the goal being a simple deathmatch points tally or a *TimeSplitters*-style contest to grab tokens dropped by wounded players. Since it's possible to lock on to a multiplayer rival as easily as a singleplayer foe, the morph ball is the key to making this mode work. Using the ball's boost function, a fleeing player can break free from an enemy lock, or even counter attack using the death ball power-up.

Upgrades are collected from around the level, and can be stolen by rivals using the hacker visor – the multiplayer equivalent of the scan visor in the main game. Escape cannons blast players to other parts of the level, and the overall experience was unexpectedly well rounded in the one-level E3 demo.

You can count on more surprises, including an additional weapon and an all-new visor, when the game is released in November.

The Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap

Format: **Game Boy Advance**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **Flagship**

This would be 2D Zelda by the numbers, were it not for the talking hat that can shrink Link to microscopic size. With shades of Tiny Huge Island, Link can ride on leaves and catapult off mushrooms to explore minuscule dungeons. A collect 'em up side quest will take advantage of the GBA wireless adapter. Flagship is a subsidiary of Capcom (partly funded by Nintendo) which made the *Oracle Of Seasons* and *Ages* games.



The Minish Cap pulls some impressive visual tricks, scaling Link up and down and rotating backdrops as he negotiates revolving puzzles and inventive traps

Mario Vs Donkey Kong

Format: **Game Boy Advance**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **In-house**

Mario goes back to his ladder-climbing and barrel-dodging roots as the premise that first captivated a globeful of gamers gets a full update.

Requiring you to rescue an army of mini Mario dolls stolen by the nerafrious Bowser, there's a stronger puzzle element that you might expect and a fresh, colourful look. Released almost hot on the heels of E3 in the US, expect a full review in **E**139.



Mario's hammer makes a welcome return in what is ostensibly a revival of the original Game Boy *Donkey Kong* update

StarFox

Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **Namco**

After the bitter taste of *StarFox Adventures: Dinosaur Planet* comes the delight of an all-new *StarFox*. Ranking high on the list of E3's finest, the first proper GameCube outing of the SNES and N64 classic was a pleasure to play. Conceptually, it may not have been particularly novel, but it was one of the most solid and enjoyable experiences available.

Two singleplayer levels were available; one pitched Fox McCloud and his Arwing into the melee of a space war, while the other mixed thirdperson action with control of the Landmaster tank. And it was the latter which really impressed.

Most notable was the on-foot control, one of the weakest elements in *Dinosaur Planet*. Relying on the FPS standard of left analogue to move and right analogue to aim, additional control is provided by strafing using the left shoulder button. It takes a little bit of getting used to, and the auto-aiming remains twitchy, but the arcadey nature of the game means this is less of an issue than it might otherwise be.

Good level design matched the weapon upgrades with more powerful foes, so it was with some trepidation that the Landmaster arrived in conjunction with some crab-like missile-firing monster bugs. Control was key here too, with the strafing modified to a spinning left or right roll. This acted as a defensive manoeuvre but also served to crush smaller opponents. The Landmaster was also able to hover for a period of time, opening up new areas of the level.

It was almost as promising in the space mission. Typical of previous *StarFox* games, the Arwing controls remain much the same, with a defensive spin roll available plus various trick manoeuvres, a lock-on firing mode and plenty of smart bombs. Interspersed within the wave of incoming enemies ships were much larger bonus craft – all of which were thrown at the player through the sort of on-rails experience for which the series is renowned.

Also available were various multiplayer modes. Most interesting was the fourplayer deathmatch, which pits on-foot players against those in Arwings and Landmasters. Crafty tuning means each has its own advantages, with on-foot participants able to fire at their more powerful enemies from hiding places. Another mode allows coop missions to be played either splitscreen or with one player riding shotgun on the wing of the Arwing or perched on the side of the Landmaster. It all adds up to a highly effective package.





Deep space has rarely looked this good – at least not on GameCube. In gameplay terms, though, it's the action set on planet surfaces that more immediately impresses

Mario Tennis

Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **Camelot**



Camelot, which produced such excellence with N64 *Mario Tennis*, has been working on this since time – or at least GamCube – began. Worryingly, what was on show at E3 seemed gimmicky, as courts became infested with stars, ghosts and *Mario Sunshine*-style gloop, or offered advanced power-ups. Hopefully, these will be confined to alternate play modes, rather than dominating the main game.

Mario Pinball

Format: **Game Boy Advance**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **In-house**



With its naturally portrait presentation, pinball's natural handheld home could well become the DS. Until then, *Mario Pinball* may win the day. Squidged into individual screens, each 'table' is more like a standalone puzzle than an intricate machine. The ball, equally squidged, is Mario himself, moulded into a sphere. It's a wise choice – overlaying pinball tactics with Mario's stompy gameplay rather than cheap cosmetic branding.

Geist

Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **N-Space**



Having possessed an engineer's computer, your view switches to a behind-the-screen mode (above). It's a novel concept, although it may prove a little restrictive as the game pans out



Compared to its lacklustre showing last year, n-Space's possession thriller has certainly come a long way, with both graphical muscle and the game's puzzle elements now more apparent. Starting in the role of John Raimi, a federal agent who is mysteriously dislocated from his body during an investigation of the Volks Corporation, your mission is to somehow reconnect body and spirit.

Let loose in the corridors of the corporation as a firstperson perspective spectre, your sole ability is the power to possess objects, animals and humans. Of the three, objects are the easiest and least interesting ciphers, but are important as living creatures have to be scared in order to be susceptible to possession.

Typical interactions during the opening levels include gaining control of a guard dog via its food, and transferring to human sentries and engineers to pass through locked doors. More lateral tricks involve moving around the base to activate power sources and machinery to open previously inaccessible areas. And, of course, there's also the opportunity to cause confused firefights between groups of security personnel, jumping between bodies in a similar way to Shiny's *Messiah*, the game with which *Geist* is most comparable.

Yet there remain plenty of warning signs. Most worrying is the linear nature of the E3 levels, which limited the object used to scare and gain possession of any character to a choice of one. For the dog, the only option was dog food, and engineers only seemed susceptible to their PCs. *Geist*'s strict adherence to levels broken up with cut-scenes would also seem to constrict the possibilities of being a spirit in a huge underground base. On a positive note, the fourplayer humans-vs-ghosts mode provides a neat conceptual spin.

Advance Wars: Under Fire

Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **Kuju**



No wonder Guildford developer Kuju has been so chipper recently. Given the task of bringing *Advance Wars* on to GameCube and into 3D, it has certainly met the standards graphically. A cute art style backed by a responsive camera provides a great foundation but, even considering the less-than-ideal setting of E3, care will have to be taken to guide players through the tricky task of ensuring their squads are kept in synch.

Boktai 2: Solar Boy Django

Format: **Game Boy Advance**
Publisher: **Konami**
Developer: **In-house (Konami JPN)**



Sneakily using the audience for *Snake Eater* to talk up his solar-powered sequel, Hideo Kojima proceeded to explain that you didn't necessarily need sun to play at all. Which rather defeats the object. Then he checked the translation. While you don't need sun to use weapons directly (Scottish gamers rejoice), you will have to soak up some sun to power up the weapons at the solarsmith's shop. Sweetness and light, then.

Resident Evil 4

Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **Production Studio 4**

While it has been clear for some time now that *Resident Evil 4* was to be more than a mere sequel, the game's showing at E3 demonstrated its potential to a wider audience.

Test stations at both Nintendo's and Capcom's stands drew crowds of nervous onlookers who gasped, winced, and in one case took a backwards tumble over a mischievously placed camera tripod, as player after player was gruesomely dispatched during the brief but almost unbearably taut single-area demo.

It begins with a quiet stroll through sparsely populated woodland, and ends with the player barricaded in a cottage in some east European village of the damned, while hordes of dead-eyed locals make convincingly intelligent attempts to break in.

Smashing through windows, climbing onto the roof or hacking through the front door with a variety of rusty garden tools, the murderous villagers cannot be stopped. The only option is to look for an opening and make a break for it, at which point the gentleman depicted on issue 135's cover violently decapitates our hero using a chainsaw. Only the blood-drenched screen reading 'You Are Dead' serves to remind us that the breathless terror we've just experienced is a part of the traditionally pedestrian *Resident Evil* series.

Opting for a more stealthy entrance to the village seems to work well. We climb an observation tower and enjoy a lingering look at the game's sumptuously detailed graphics via the built-in Z-button binoculars, until an eagle-eyed farmer raises the alarm. Having sufficient ammo to repel invaders for at least another ten minutes comes as some consolation, until one of the villagers fetches something flammable and our hiding place becomes a towering inferno. This action-packed *Resident Evil* reimagining also includes heavy weaponry such as machine guns and cannon turrets, plus sufficiently numerous enemies to ensure the increase in firepower doesn't come at the expense of the tension that fans demand from an *Evil* game. Expect to see an end to the old item-juggling conundrums too – the E3 version had no shortage of inventory slots, and larger items such as the shotgun took up no more space than a sprig of life-giving green herb.

The game's *Ico*-style segments, in which a vulnerable second character is introduced, weren't playable at the show, but their appearance on video offered a welcome hint of something deeper than just gunplay. With no more zombies shambling around its murky halls, *Resident Evil 4* can finally exercise its brains.





Breaking down doors? Setting mantraps? Coming at you with chainsaws? No, these aren't zombies at all. They're something that's far more disturbing...





Donkey Konga

Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **In-house**

Konga has lost nothing in the localisation apart from its J-pop, which has been replaced with a more western-friendly selection (of cover versions). The American version is graced with the likes of 'Louie Louie', 'Rock Lobster' and, er, 'You Can't Hurry Love'; Europe, meanwhile, gets the likes of '99 Red Balloons', 'Wild Thing', 'Richard III' and the exotica-meets-nostalgia overload of 'The Theme from Zelda (Latin Version)'.



Displayed back-to-back with *Jungle Beat*, this was another of Nintendo's most bangingly popular showings

DK: King Of Swing

Format: **GameBoy Advance**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **Paon Corp.**

With a subtle nod toward Nintendo's classic *Clu Clu Land*, *DK: King of Swing* eschews the vine as means of canopy travel, instead utilising precariously placed hovering discs. Using only the L and R buttons (both at once to jump, alone to grasp and pivot with DK's respective hands), the game is a masterful mix of action and puzzle, with beautifully animated hand-drawn sprites (right down to DK's dangling necktie).



With a wonderful sense of inertia as you switch from disc to disc, *King of Swing* has a rare tactility for a GBA game

Q&A: Eiji Aonuma

Some called it 'game of the show' (even though it wasn't playable), and one over-excited Nintendo conference attendee even dropped to his knees in awe when he realised what he was seeing on the big screen. *Zelda* has that effect on people. We caught up with producer **Eiji Aonuma** to find out more about his latest project.

What was the thinking behind using an adult Link this time?

We always think about how we are going to express Link. So in *Ocarina Of Time* we tried to express him both as a child and as an adult; in *Majora's Mask*, Link was a child; and we changed the style of art in *Wind Waker*, using toon-shading, and we expressed him as a child again. But this time we thought about it and something we hadn't done yet with the property was to express Link as an adult, so we tried to focus on that. We want to challenge that.

What was your reaction to those who disliked *Wind Waker*'s cel shading?

The toon-shading graphics are very particular and I expected some likes and dislikes. Of course, it appeals to some people and others may not like it. But it was perfect for expressing Link as a child – and the gameplay was easy to control – so that's why we chose that style. But for people who actually played the game, I think they were satisfied because it was perfect style for Link in that game. For this new game of course I thought about some opinion that was given on *Wind Waker*, but it's not really the reason why we changed the style.

Can you explain why we're seeing a new *Zelda* game at E3, and not a new *Mario*? It seems that *Zelda* has more importance than *Mario* for Nintendo right now.

[Laughs] I feel that both franchises are very important for Nintendo, and I hope that the gameplay of the *Mario* franchise can be widened, too. But my main focus is the *Zelda* series. For *Mario*, Mr Miyamoto is going to be more involved in the future and we may be able to see more of *Mario* later.

The video we saw at the press conference showed lots of combat. Is the *Zelda* series becoming more violent?

When we started working on this project a lot of people thought, well, we're making this Link an adult, and we want to see a very cool Link, so the combat works well with that image of Link – how he throws his sword and puts it away; it looks very cool. But in *Zelda* games we always think about other elements, and there may be some funny, comical parts to it. It's possible that you'll see a wide variety of elements.

The video also focused on horseriding. Will this be a big part of the game?

One of the things about the horseriding is that it's really Mr Miyamoto's favourite. He always wanted to do that; he wanted to do that in *Ocarina Of Time* but it didn't happen. But this time I remembered that he mentioned it during *Ocarina Of Time*, so I suggested using this element in the new game. And Mr Miyamoto wanted to see Link fight on horseback, so I added that.

Does Mr Miyamoto ever have ideas to which you have to say "no"?

[Laughs] Of course, I have a lot of communication with Mr Miyamoto and sometimes I can't tell if he is kidding, but sometimes he mentions things so many times that I think maybe he really wants to do it. So sometimes it works that way.

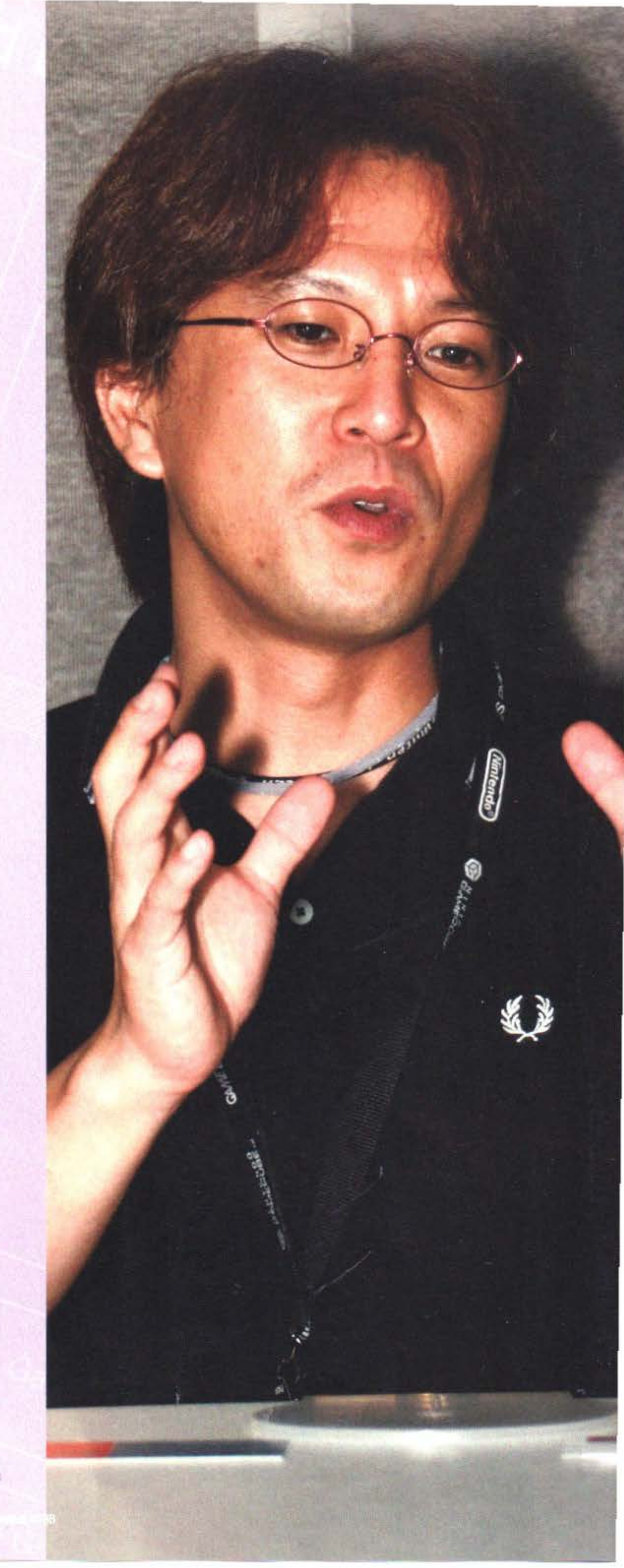
"We want to see a very cool Link, so the combat works well with that image – how he throws his sword and puts it away looks cool"

Games are obviously taking longer to develop nowadays. What are your thoughts on that?

I'm not really dissatisfied with the long process, but the graphics have improved and the technology allows us to pay more attention to details. It's good and bad. When we make mistakes we have to go back to the designer and the programmer and we have to fix it and it takes a long time. We always think about speeding up the process; how can we make it more efficient? With the new *Zelda* we're utilising the *Wind Waker* engine so we saved some time there. We're always thinking about re-utilising the materials we already have.

In the video we saw Link pushing blocks and other familiar elements. What new gameplay will you be introducing?

We're always working on new ideas, of course. But you see with the block, players may already know that they'll be able to push it, but they may get a different result this time. So we're thinking about surprising players this way.



The Legend Of Zelda

Format: **GameCube**

Publisher: **Nintendo**

Developer: **In-house**

Where *Ocarina* explored time travel and *Wind Waker* centred on making use of sea breezes as a means of transport, this new Link adventure will certainly offer something similarly innovative, although Nintendo will not yet be drawn on exactly what that might be – hence the game's lack of a giveaway subtitle right now.

What is clear is that this might be the most action-oriented *Zelda* to date: early scenes show a Link on horseback engaging in combat and attempting to evade the attentions of hog-riding adversaries training bows and arrows in his direction. Leisurely trots atop Epona around open countryside may soon be a thing of the past.

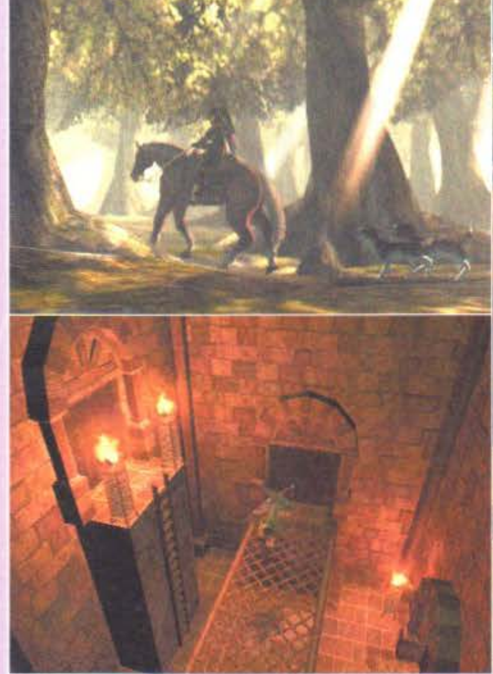
On-foot combat seems to follow 3D *Zelda*'s established format (the action even freezes for a microsecond when you land a critical hit, just as it did in *Wind Waker*), and Nintendo has also shown a traditionally styled fiery boss battle sequence.

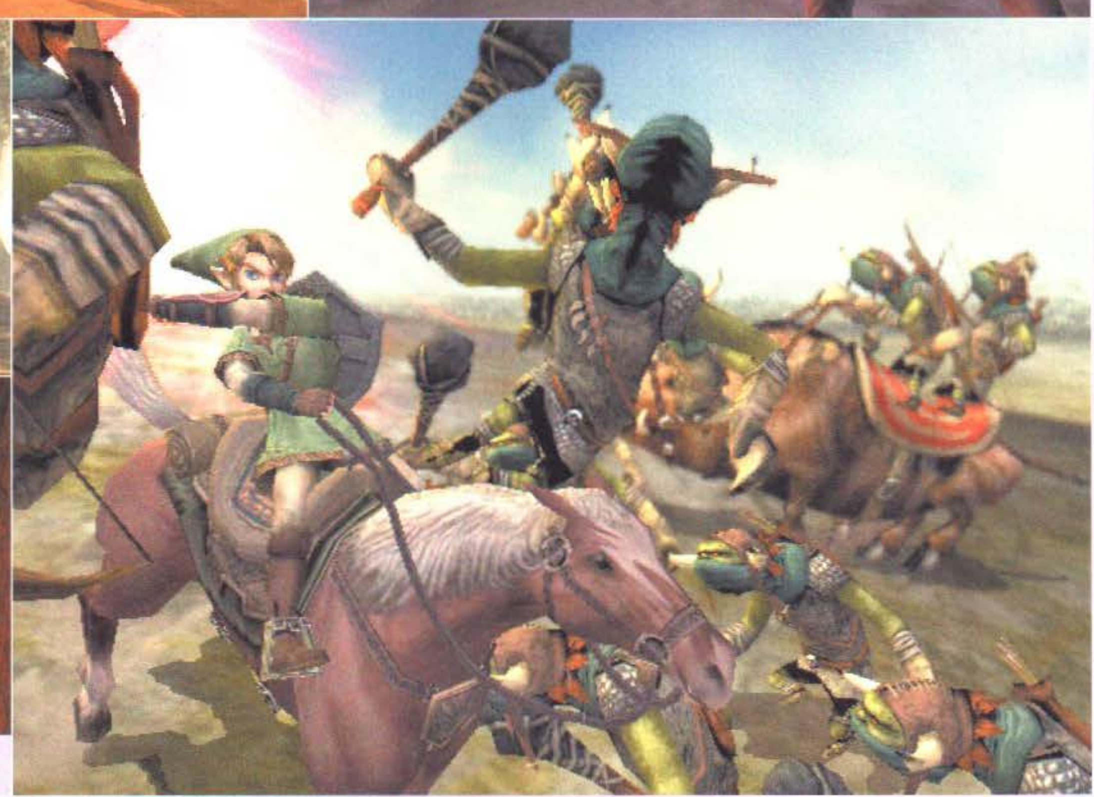
One totally new feature indicated by the behind-closed-doors presentation at E3 is a group of beagles working alongside Link. It's not clear what these hunting dogs will be used to gather, but their inclusion could open up some interesting subgames.

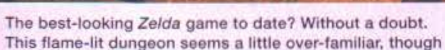
As for dungeons, this hardly looks like entirely new territory, although Nintendo could be holding back the surprises for the game's next showing.











The best-looking *Zelda* game to date? Without a doubt. This flame-lit dungeon seems a little over-familiar, though

Metal Slug Advance

Format: **Game Boy Advance**
Publisher: **SNK Playmore**
Developer: **In-house**

For years, those without a NGPC have been wistfully jealous of those who could slug it out on the move. Now it comes to GBA, and SNK Playmore seems to have been lavishing a preposterous level of care on its Nintendo debut. The graphical brilliance is as strong as you would expect – vibrant, detailed and inherently hilarious – and card collecting sub-missions complement the running and gunning and gunning some more.



The usual zoo of vehicles is available, each cuter and deadlier than the last

Amazing Island

Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **Ancient**

Licensing Takeo Igarashi's Teddy sketch modelling system (as used in *Magical Pengel*), *Amazing Island* has you drawing shapes using the stick and watching as they morph into living 3D creatures. Rather than being restricted to turn-based paper-rock-scissors battles, the newly created monsters test their mettle in an array of minigames from races to hoop throwing. GBA connectivity will let you take your beasts on the road.



Winning minigames lets you unlock more body types with which to adorn your pet

Odama

Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **Vivarium**

For what is fundamentally a pinball game, *Odama*'s accompanying plaques, samurai armour and sword courtesy of a 'Kyoto secret art museum' displayed alongside the game at E3, wove an entirely unexpected backstory.

The game, the introduction solemnly intoned, began life as a military simulation to test the strategic properties of the Nin-Ten-Do, or 'Way Of The Ninten'. The Nin-Ten-Do is an ancient ideology preceding the bushido that, unlike bushido's pitting of one swordsman against another, saw epic battles involving armies of tens of thousands of soldiers. Mysteriously, it remains entirely unrecorded in history. What bound these countless nameless soldiers together to die for causes for which they'd soon be forgotten? Relinquishing personal interest and throwing their fate into the hands of the gods, or Nin-Ten-Do – 'The Way Of Leaving Fate To Heaven'.

Right, so, back to the pinball. The demo consisted of a melee between Nin-Ten-Do disciple Yamanouchi Kagetora and his troops, battle-worn and weaponless save for the Odama (a giant ball believed to once belong to a Chinese dragon), and Kendare, Kagetora's arch-nemesis, with his own heavily fortified army. The object is to aid your troops, who advance autonomously up the playfield as you flatten enemy soldiers (and, careful, sometimes your own as well) and demolish enemy structures (such as archer towers) with the Odama. Also at your disposal, by holding X as you launch the Odama with the flippers, is a special attack that captures and converts any enemy soldiers it touches, replenishing the troop reserves ready to fight at your command.

Wholly weird and endlessly fascinating – which is perhaps not surprising given that the game is being developed by *Seaman* creator Yoot Saito – *Odama* was one of the lowest-profile games of the show, sitting patiently against the far back wall of Nintendo's booth, like a puzzle begging to be solved.



Like *Shogun: Total War* with the added threat of an accusatory TILT, *Odama*'s genre-bending craziness would be appealing enough even if it didn't take itself very seriously indeed



Paper Mario 2

Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **In-house**



One of the advantages of being paper thin is that hundreds of enemies can crowd the corridors, requiring Mario to let fly with his hammer and killer bounce



You can be Bowser. You can be Bowser and grow enormous and demolish whole levels by wandering about, boinging the end-of-level flag out into the screen with an absent-minded flick of your tail.

It was this more than anything else that was fuelling the *Paper Mario 2* buzz around the Nintendo booths. The core of the game is absolutely in keeping with *Mario RPG* traditions of exploring, puzzling and stomping on your opponents' heads. The koopa theatres which form the setting for battles proved to be far more than a neat visual joke. To power up you'll need to appeal to the crowd by giving them cute little waves: fail to please them, and they'll pelt you with garbage and boos (the shouting kind, not the ghost kind).

The paper motif has been greatly elaborated: Mario can't just fold himself into a plane, he'll also be able to slide through cracks in a way his normal girth would completely preclude. It also governs the entire aesthetic of the game, where dragons are folded out of sheets of card and animations happen flick-book style.

Donkey Kong: Jungle Beat

Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **In-house (EAD Tokyo)**

Silencing detractors eager to pounce on Nintendo's seeming penchant for unsupportable oddball peripherals, and pleasing just about everyone who (literally) laid their hands on it, *DK: Jungle Beat* was the surprise hit from Nintendo's arsenal.

EAD Tokyo had a decidedly challenging task before it – take a heavily customised music-game controller, as seen in *Donkey Konga*, and create an action game. In response, the group seamlessly assembled a string of gameplay scenarios and intuitively contextualised the inputs for each. In most cases, rapping the left or right drum moves DK in the according direction; hitting both at once jumps. Clapping accomplishes tasks ranging from forming mushroom platforms and springboard flowers to standard attacks and ground pounds.

The coup de grace was a boxing match with a red-eyed adversary that recalled a certain Nintendo classic. Clapping at just the right moment to dodge an attack, and countering by beating furiously on the drums – sending forth a flurry of jabs – proved highly satisfying.





Unquestionably the surprise game of the show for some, *Jungle Beat* is the first game to give true physical expression to Donkey Kong's jovial clumsiness

Halo 2

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Microsoft**
Developer: **Bungie**

"We believe we've done it," says the anonymous Bungie representative within the secret, womb-like structure deep inside Microsoft's grand E3 booth where *Halo 2* is being demonstrated to select individuals. "We believe we've captured the LAN-party experience, but on the internet with people all over the world."

But internet play is not on today's agenda. Instead we're System Linked, with two teams, red and blue, Elites and Spartans. "Elites are just as badass as Spartans," reckons the man from Bungie, "although they look a bit cooler, I think." He manoeuvres the game camera to give us a good look. "You can see their custom emblems – the Spartans can customise their armour with custom emblems and custom colours."

We're in Zanzibar, 20 clicks north of Mombasa. It's not an enormous level, nor is it especially extravagant when it comes to detail. But it's what you do within its confines that matters, and we spend an entertaining half an hour soaking up what isn't so much a *Halo* revolution as 'just' a significant overhaul of one of the world's best multiplayer experiences.

The camera pans around some more and we're shown a secret area that can be unlocked by careful use of the architecture. In it sits an energy sword, the most powerful weapon in the game – using it while making a diving attack is enough to kill most enemies with one hit, we're assured.

More immediately effective are the ghosts, whose boost capability, effected by a squeeze of the left trigger, essentially turns them into missiles. Lining up adversaries and running them down in this manner proves a remarkably effective – and supremely satisfying – strategy.

Gun emplacements provide cover opportunities in this game of Capture The Flag, while dual-wielding weapons turns you into a death-dealing machine. Our time is up, and we're left with one feeling: we want to play *Halo 2* some more.







Bungie claims that the energy sword is the most powerful weapon in the game, although heat-seeking rockets also do some serious damage. One of the most amusing elements of the multiplayer game is being able to push enemies from their ghosts and turn the tables

Chronicles Of Riddick

Format: **PC, Xbox**
Publisher: **Vivendi Universal/Tigon**
Developer: **Starbreeze**

The sequel to B-movie Pitch Black will soon be released, but *Chronicles Of Riddick* plays the prequel game, placing Riddick back in top-security Butcher Bay incarceration. The goal is to escape by any means necessary. Much has been made of Riddick's see-in-the-dark eyes, which feature extensively in terms of gameplay, although it's still unclear how the whole thing hangs together. There's no denying its super-swish look, though.



This was one of the biggest draws on Microsoft's stand, chiefly because few had previously paid it any attention

Iron Phoenix

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Sammy**
Developer: **Interserv**

Sammy's 16-player martial arts deathmatch is in safe hands: Taiwanese developer InterServ will no doubt be using the experience (and netcode) gained from its 2003 PC online brawler, *Meteor Blade*. A *Mortal Kombat*-style overdesigned edginess has been applied liberally, and stricken characters fount geysers of blood, but the underlying gameplay possesses a wire-fu austerity that could make it a cult hit on Live.



Attacks are determined by your current weapon, not character, which generates a lively and unpredictable playing field

Conker Live & Reloaded

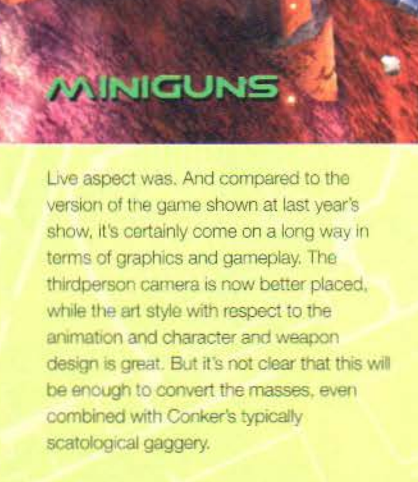
Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Microsoft**
Developer: **Rare**








If nothing else, *Conker*'s visuals go some way to single-handedly redressing the colour imbalance in the otherwise predominantly dour deathmatch scene



What to make of Rare's continuing affection for Conker? It's hardly the highest-profile IP in gaming history, but, together with new boss Microsoft, the developer remains determined to offer gamers another opportunity to enjoy the Nintendo 64 game *Bad Fur Day* given a once-over with Xbox spit and polish. That's the *Reloaded* bit of the title, at least.

Unsurprisingly, the singleplayer game wasn't on show at E3, but the team-based Live aspect was. And compared to the version of the game shown at last year's show, it's certainly come on a long way in terms of graphics and gameplay. The thirdperson camera is now better placed, while the art style with respect to the animation and character and weapon design is great. But it's not clear that this will be enough to convert the masses, even combined with Conker's typically scatological gaggery.

As with almost every other game, the multiplayer levels are huge; perhaps too huge considering the rather short legs with which the playable characters are provided – maybe *Tribes*-style rocket packs wouldn't go amiss. Also thrown into the mix are fixed gun turrets, vehicles and hovering gunships, all of which seem to be too powerful to be taken down by the grunts.

Partly, of course, this sort of imbalance during E3 is more likely an issue of inexperienced players, since the game promises plenty of tactical elements, including spy-style feigned deaths and nifty camera-guided rockets, the use of which will only come to the fore as players become more familiar with the game. And with plenty of development time remaining, Rare can still make good any other balance issues. If nothing else, the exercise will at least serve as another outlet for its staffers' puerile sense of humour.

GunGriffon

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Tecmo**
Developer: **GameArts**



This firstperson mech action series has a history of jumping platforms, having graced the Saturn, PS2 and now Xbox. Sporting a squad-based style rather than the lone wolf play of previous versions, the singleplayer game sees you in the field with five AI-controlled wingmen, and multiplayer is to support six-on-six team clashes over Live. This could win *GunGriffon* the western prominence that has previously evaded it.

DOA Ultimate

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Tecmo**
Developer: **In-house (Team Ninja)**



Despite only being remakes of *Dead Or Alive* and *Dead Or Alive 2*, albeit lavish ones, *DOA Ultimate* garnered a good deal of E3 attention. Tecmo played it for gasps, showing off arena interactivity and special moves. Expect to be snowboarding down mountains on your opponent's back and tossing them into passing elephants. The bigger deal, however, is the full Live compatibility on offer.

Kameo: Elements Of Power

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Microsoft**
Developer: **Rare**





Watching *Kameo*'s visual evolution had become something of a full-time job, but it's now settled down to the immaculate level of detail expected of Rare



Another of Rare's games which generated a lukewarm response in previous years, *Kameo* returns to E3 looking much more like the finished article.

Gameplay remains directed around the ability to morph into elementally based monsters, each of which contains the necessary powers to enable progress through each level's combat and exploration tasks. So far, so Rare, but what really impressed was the game's overall consistency. From graphics to animation, AI to control, it all looked and felt right. Most important in this respect was the combat, which was the main focus of the E3 demo. Both right and left triggers are used to launch different attacks, depending on your current chosen form. Playing as Pummel Weed for example, you get different punches, and combining them results in a fearsome sequences of uppercuts. The armadillo-like Major Ruin rolls into a ball for spinning and jumping. Further control is provided by Warrior Focus skills, which bullet-time the action so players can switch forms in the heat of battle.

SpikeOut: Battle Street

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **Amusement Vision**

It was never going to be a game of finesse. The original *SpikeOut*, an arcade classic which Toshihiro Nagoshi turned to 'because I was getting a little bit fed up of making racing games' offered flexible controls, vicious weapons and an irresistible fourplayer link-up coop mode which few people in the UK got to experience.

Now, with the game being brought to Xbox Live, the potential for a convivial mass brawl has never been so accessible. There's a lot about *Battle Street* (previously known as *SpikeOut Extreme*) that will be familiar from the arcade. The four characters – Spike, White, Linda and Tenshin – make a return, and the three-button controllers have been adapted to include special attacks on the white and black buttons.

Weirdly, the game's main appeal – its link-up potential – wasn't demoed at the show. What was playable was a survival mode, which proved disappointingly repetitive. Amusement Vision also has a long way to go before *Battle Street*'s visuals do any justice to Xbox's graphical potential.





SpikeOut disappointed in terms of character models, animation and immediate environments – although there were some lovely long-distance vistas to be seen

Forza Motorsport

Format: **Xbox** | Publisher: **Microsoft** | Developer: **In-house**





Like its contemporaries, *Forza* offers various racing classes, allowing you to take Japanese saloon cars for a spin or wrestle with GT models. It's all wrapped up in a storming 3D engine

In the build-up to this game's announcement at Microsoft's pre-E3 briefing, everyone was expecting another *Project Gotham Racing* sequel to be unveiled. It turned out the company was talking about an altogether more serious brand of driving action, one it hopes will give Xbox its own reply to *Gran Turismo*.

But the development team behind the game, made up of Microsoft Game Studios staff with experience on titles such as *Midtown Madness*, does not have the pedigree of Polyphony Digital – although that hasn't stopped them creating what looks to be a genuinely provocative effort.

A wide range of licensed vehicles – all capable of taking damage – will appear in the finished game, and Xbox Live support is a given. Perhaps of more interest to truly dedicated petrolheads, though, is the option to run the game on several linked Xboxes with output to three screens, side by side, arcade *F355*-style, for a more realistic in-cockpit sensation. It certainly makes approaching hairpin bends a more manageable proposition…

MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf

Format: **Xbox** | Publisher: **Microsoft** | Developer: **Day 1 Studios**

MechAssault, despite its revered position as the granddaddy of Xbox Live, was a sorely limited game. The sequel, as well as looking shinier and grander, opens up a wealth of tantalising possibilities.

Instead of being limited to one mech, players are free to hop out on to the battlefield and take control of any vehicle they fancy, and it really is any vehicle, since *Lone Wolf* introduces tanks and vertical-take-off-and-landing craft. Unprotected humans are just begging to be pureed under a descending Atlas foot, but those equipped with power armour can use their claw grapple to attempt to hijack passing vehicles. This triggers a button-pressing minigame between the pilot and the hijacker. Whoever loses takes a hard fall.

It all comes together to add considerable tactical complexity to the battles – VTOLs can carry up to two power armoured players into the heat of battle, who might then hijack two key vehicles, perform suicidal shelling runs with them, and then hop out just before they explode. Who could resist?





The original Xbox *MechAssault* was a notoriously ploddy experience, but this has been seriously addressed in the sequel, which allows you to pilot several small, nippy mechs

Q&A: J Allard

For some time now the official face of Microsoft's Xbox strategy, **J Allard** has a lot on his plate. But his hunger for the challenge remains undiminished, and at E3 we found him eager to explain where the platform is going, and why we should expect even more from its successor…

Up until now, Microsoft has been almost humble with Xbox, but this E3 we've seen a very different attitude – you've come out punching. What's happened?

I think we have a really solid footing now in the market. We're still the underdogs, we're still the new guys on the block, but we've really enjoyed the success of Xbox Live. The Trump video at our presentation (see p7) was… Well, if you watched The Apprentice, which I know is more popular on our side of the world than elsewhere, they have 16 assignments, and one team lost five assignments in a row and then finally won one. That's kind of how we felt. [Laughs.] It's like [Sony] killed us here, and they beat us up here and they beat us up here, and, y'know, with the online stuff there was a lot of scepticism about Live, but we had a great year with Live.

I think people said, "Broadband, it's not going to work; the voice thing, you're nuts, you're not going to get the publisher support that you want, there's no money in it," and retailers had similar kinds of concerns: "What does this mean for my business?" What it means is the group of eight people who all hang out together now buy eight copies of *Counter-Strike* instead of two or three and pass them around. Retailers are very happy about it, so we really had a banner year with Live, and I think what we've demonstrated in the last 18 months, our strategy is really coming to the forefront. We got through the hardware hurdle, we got through the launch hurdle, we got through the online and bringing up the service hurdle, we got through putting out some games and getting into the rhythm of publishing, we got through a couple partnership hurdles. Now we're locked and loaded, and our vision is starting to really come to life, where we're saying online gaming *is* going to change the game, and it's starting to.

Our software strategy and actually appealing to developers using this XNA architecture to make better games faster is starting to come to life; we're starting to realise that dream now. Our publishing of games on Xbox, both the exclusives and the ones from our partners with EA now on Live… we have *Halo 2*, we have *Fable* coming, we have *Jade Empire*, people are raving about *Conker* and a lot of those things. Publishing is really strong – we really think we're leading in important categories.

And we knew at the beginning of this generation that we weren't going to win the championship. We kind of thought about it as a sporting season: we weren't going to make the play-offs, we started way too late; we announced the thing six days after PlayStation2 was on the shelf and we'd never built one before. It was very unlikely unless Sony screwed up materially that we could even approach first place.

People love to fixate on these numbers but, for us, it's not about the numbers – we knew we weren't going to win the championship. It is about the momentum and we've had four or five weeks now at retail where it's been phenomenal, publishing is strong, Live is strong, software development is strong, partnerships are strong, we're locked and loaded, we just started way too late, and we're going to take all that strength and we're going to bring that into the next generation. We'll take all the leadership we have and the innovation that we have now, and apply that to the next generation, and the other guys aren't going to get a head start.

Next season is going to be a whole lot more interesting when you start looking at the scores, and I think we will be on really solid ground.

"People love to fixate on sales numbers but, for us, it's not about the numbers – we knew we weren't going to win the championship"

You seem to be attempting to change Xbox's profile from a machine for the enthusiast to something a casual consumer might use.

We're doing more and more of that. If you take a publisher like THQ and a lot of the properties they have, the time is right now in the Xbox Live lifecycle for them. We're broadening the audience and some of the games are targeted more towards kids, or more towards adults who want to play with their kids. And adults who used to play videogames are starting to emerge – some of the classic arcade packs have been doing pretty well on Xbox. The notion for Live Arcade, though… we named it Arcade



for a very good reason. I mean, we used to go to arcades when we were kids, but in an arcade a dollar and 15 minutes turns into five dollars and an hour, but it never turns into 50 dollars and 50 hours, which is what console videogaming is now. So I think there's an untapped opportunity for people to experience Xbox and experience Xbox Live with Arcade, a real opportunity.

We have a couple of different slants with it. There are classic games for people who used to play games who want to have access but there's no real business model for it. Namco's bundled up the $19 collection of hits, but there's not a lot of money in that – selling five or ten games at $20 – because you've got the retail thing, you've got the big royalty thing, you've got to manufacture the disc, you've got to buy the package, you've got to put it on store shelves, you have to take returns – it's a mess. But there's so much intellectual property out there that we'd love to create a channel for, a channel that works for everybody, where the retailers can make some money, we can make some money, the publishers can make some money, but you're not making discs. Discs are expensive for those types of things.

Then what about family night where I just want to play cards with some family friends? The communication capabilities of Xbox are great – how do you remotely bring somebody into your card game? I think the classic card and boardgames are more opportunities for maybe a parent or a girlfriend, or whatever, who's not an Xbox enthusiast and who is not going to play a 50-hour game, to participate.

The casual games are another way to expand the demographic. Over 50 per cent of the users of Zone are women, and that's not the case with the Xbox demographic at all. And they love a lot of the properties that we publish on the Zone; how can we create a channel for that and play it on the big-screen TV? And I want to play a lot of those games on the big-screen TV. Some of them are designed entirely for the PC – we understand that – but there's some that would be great to play in the living room.

How will you charge for Arcade?

We'll charge by title. Again, it's a little experimental. We can't have great precision in saying 'What's the value of this?' In the arcade in America the value was a quarter. Everybody understood that, it's a very established precedent, and very straightforward. We don't have that yet with Arcade. What's evolved in the webgame space on the PC is try-before-you-buy – the game is free to download, you can play anywhere between ten and 20 per cent of it, and then you pay to play the rest of it. That seems to be an emerging model. I think that model might be appropriate, but then there are games like poker where it's not a very sophisticated game to develop, there's not a high development cost, and it's more about the social interaction. We make money on the Live service, so maybe we don't have to charge for that at all, or maybe it's just a one-time thing. You want to be able to play with everybody who's on the Live service, and it's a social game, so now we're going to force everyone to buy the card game before you can even play? That doesn't seem right. So I think the classic games... I mean, *Robotron*, you're not going to play the first three levels of *Robotron* and then pay for the rest, so *Robotron* you might pay for, but the web-style games, the casual games, the newer games, you might be able to play at the beginning for free and then pay for the rest, and then some classic boardgame might be free, where the value to the consumer and the value to us is the Live service.

"I think there's an untapped opportunity for people to experience Xbox and experience Xbox Live with Arcade, a real opportunity"

And what does retail think of this plan?

We're getting feedback from them. The point is that there's no market, OK? So poker – OK, Wal-Mart, Dixon's, let's have a serious meeting about this.

We had somebody write an Xbox poker game in one month – is that worth 50 bucks? No, it's not worth 50 bucks. You can't sell poker on a console today. It doesn't exist. So I don't think that it's a threat for retail at all. We're not going to sell *Halo 2* outside of the retail channel – it's not a technical practicality, it's not our strategy at all; what we're trying to do is augment what exists with something that I think brings a unique aspect to the service. I would never go to a store thinking I could spend $3 and buy a copy of *Robotron*. And the travesty is that there is all that intellectual property that isn't going anywhere because there's no real way to package it. So I think it's a good thing for the industry.







From top: *Bejeweled*, *Hamster Ball* and *Zuma Deluxe* – three 'casual' PC gaming experiences coming to Xbox Live, along with arcade classics like *Galaxian* and *Robotron*

We broaden that audience... Let's just say that, take the three- or five-year view of Xbox Live Arcade and say that this really blossoms into an entirely different channel – look at the web. I love the animation stuff that happens on the web. I love Strongbad, I love Weebl And Bob, I love all these little animation cartoons. They're not going to get syndicated on television, they're not going to be in movie theatres, they needed this channel to get it to me, and it's ad-sponsored or whatever, and that's what we need to do – we need to create a channel for an alternative form of entertainment that doesn't exist. If we do that, and we get people really engaged in it, and we grow the gaming category by ten per cent, retail absolutely wins because now you have people who were never engaged in gaming before buying Live headsets and Live subscriptions through retail, they're buying Xboxes, and maybe they're buying $50 purchases to augment what got them into the console in the first place, which might be this online experience.

Jade Empire

Format: **Xbox** | Publisher: **Microsoft** | Developer: **BioWare**





The oriental setting makes for a welcome change of scene from the BioWare RPG factory. Drawing from a strong cinematic heritage, *Jade Empire* prioritises stylish eastern combat

The frenetic Hong Kong martial arts movies that inspire *Jade Empire* never waited for anyone to take their turn, so it's appropriate that BioWare has eschewed the turn-based (if fluid) combat of *Knights Of The Old Republic* for hack 'n' slash taken to the nth degree. Which is not to say that *Jade Empire* is, say, *Diablo* meets movies like Iron Monkey or Enter The Dragon, but RPG fans should beware – *Jade Empire* is in play foremost an action game, with a complex fighting system comprising not just armed and unarmed combat, but also a variety of different martial styles, as well some tricksy special modes (including that mode de jour, pseudo bullet-time), all kicked off via a quick way with the control pad. Oh, and spell-casting, too.

For those prepared to take their RPGs with a dash of adrenaline, it looks promising. More than 30 combat styles allow for near-limitless character customisation (with results visible at a touch of a button) while the gorgeously rendered far eastern setting, all waterfalls and Tibetan caves, could reinvigorate a tiring genre.

Fable

Format: **Xbox** | Publisher: **Microsoft** | Developer: **Lionhead Studios**

Fable is at a stage where we'll have to see it to believe it. An RPG innovatively premised on seeing long hours of gameplay change your character's appearance and place in the world was never going to work as a 20-minute preview, and the pods at E3 did little to change our feeling – it's promising, lavish, and overdue.

Fable feels like it is finally nearing release, with framerate problems improving and the design solidifying (including the decision to abandon development of a multiplayer option). And yet, sometimes we suspected we were seeing shortcuts. For instance, if you buy ale and hand it out to get a villager drunk, there's a glowing targeting mechanic. The villager acquires an aura that changes colour depending on their feelings. It's effective, but hints perhaps at a failure to finesse the interactions sufficiently to relay this information. More worryingly, in a test the combat felt clunky, particularly when facing multiple foes.

The proof will be in the playing. With a host of RPGs now headed to Xbox, *Fable* needs to become reality, fast.





Residual Bullfrog touches, such as the literal indication that your hero is a hit with the local lasses (top), can be overbearingly twee in comparison to otherwise careful fairytale aesthetics

Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Microsoft**
Developer: **Epic**





The game will contain both Campaign and Tournament modes, and Live and System Link will naturally be possible



It's simplest to disregard the baroque title of this spin-off and consider it a new start for *Unreal* on Xbox. Rather than continuing the theme of Digital Extremes' first *Championship* game, the franchise creator has built *UC2* from the ground up as a distinctly Epic take on console action.

A greater focus on environmental acrobatics, Z-targeted melee combat and an optional (though it quickly becomes mandatory) thirdperson view further mine the arcade seam already present in *Unreal*'s multiplayer. Ranged weapons are now chosen before a match to fill the post-*Halo* limited arsenal, though the game's signature weapons from Flak Cannon to BioRifle seem to be accounted for.

Bringing an energy blade to a gunfight isn't as one-sided as it sounds, as well-timed blocks can deflect incoming fire, and once the distance is closed combos and finishing strikes provide some degree of melee superiority – until a third player settles things with a rocket. If Epic maintains the mechanic balance, *UC2* could prove the most exhilarating episode yet.

Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Codemasters**
Developer: **Bohemia Interactive**

It's no surprise that Codemasters has decided to port its best-selling PC game of all time to Xbox, but the fact that it's waited so long is puzzling.

The delay, allied to the decision not to create an Xbox-specific game from top to bottom in the manner of *Call Of Duty: Finest Hour*, has left *Operation Flashpoint* looking a little limp and dated in comparison to its military-themed competitors. There are 14 new standalone missions and Xbox Live multiplayer options but, visually, *Flashpoint* isn't in the hunt. The controls have also been adapted for the Xbox pad, with orders picked from lists.

Fortunately, the vast maps and the freedom of movement that made the PC original such fun have been retained, along with the impressive mission editor – you'll be able to upload your own creations for other Live players to enjoy. The ability to take each mission by the scruff of the neck and approach it in your own way, piloting the attack copter or commanding your 12-man squad from a safe distance, should be the clincher.





The action can be viewed from first or thirdperson, and vehicles are expected to be drivable

Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Konami**
Developer: **In-house (Konami JPN)**

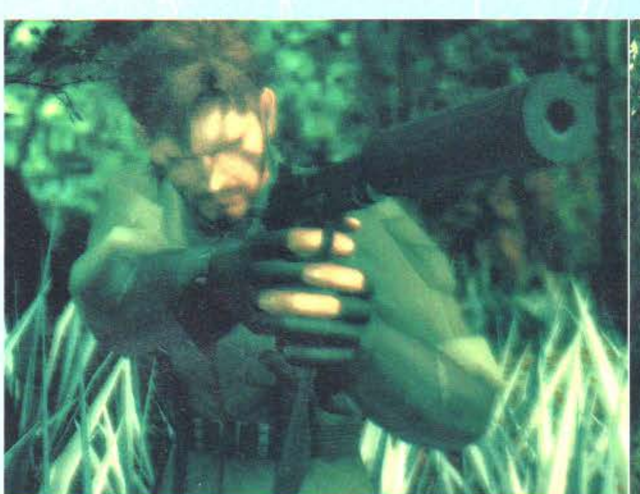
"The theme of *Metal Gear Solid* 1 was genetic inheritance," says **Hideo Kojima**, as the word 'Gene' flashes up on the screen. "*MGS2* was about passing information to future generations through our culture and ideology," as the word 'Meme' appears. "When we place these two elements on our own timeline, we are setting up a 'Scene'," and even Kojima himself can't stifle a chuckle as the initials of the three keywords are rearranged to spell MGS. It's nonsense, and he knows it.

Kojima's mischievous mock profundity remains to the fore as he attempts to position *MGS3* as a serious commentary on the cold war, before showing how spinning Snake around rapidly on the character status screen will cause him to vomit up his lunch of mango and raw frog. Judging by the new trailer – inspiring awe and amusement in equal measure – *Snake Eater*'s plot will be as ludicrously convoluted as *Sons Of Liberty*. A young Revolver Ocelot twirling his pistols for the Russian army? A femme fatale persuading Snake to defect? A mad lightning-veined enemy colonel grabbing privates by the privates? You got it. In spades.

Snake is also seen manning a formidable cannon emplacement and firing at enemies riding what look like jetpack-propelled pulpits. This, and the inevitable mumblings about nuclear-equipped Metal Gear tanks, undermine any sense of historical authenticity, but the set-piece battles certainly look fun to play.

The playable E3 levels concentrated on Snake's new ability to climb trees, hunt wildlife for food and camouflage himself (a contest on Konami's website (at http://jpn00.konami.co.jp/products/mgs3/english) is now open, inviting gamers to submit their own camo designs for inclusion in the game). As you're initially dumped into the east Asian jungle with no provisions, scavenging for food is a major imperative. If Snake is hungry, his speed of movement decreases, his aim becomes unsteady, and his wounds don't heal. Animals don't have to be killed outright, however – you can cage them alive to preserve their meat or use the scorpions and snakes to frighten enemies.

A new 'close-quarter combat' system allows Snake to kick, punch or use his knife to take hostages and threaten enemies. With the camouflage index replacing the radar, play initially seems more cautious than ever, although once drawn into a firefight Snake's improved agility gives him a chance against the increasingly sly AI. The jungle survival element is evidently only a tiny proportion of what Kojima has in mind for Snake (or Big Boss, or Raiden, or whoever it is this time). As the lyrics to the hilariously overwrought Goldfinger-style theme song would have it, "I'm still in a dream, snake eater".







If you thought that the majority of Snake's camouflage costumes would remain unused, you didn't reckon with the ruined red-brick building he encounters deep in the jungle



Chulip

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Natsume**
Developer: **Punchline**



It's a game about kissing (*everyone*); it's a reaction to Japanese society's increasing isolation; it's so morbidly bizarre as to make *Gregory Horror Show* look straight-laced. Most inexplicable of all, it's getting a western release, seemingly with its surreal humour largely intact. Hopefully, the game will sidestep any censorship by virtue of its practically subterranean niche appeal – cross your fingers and pucker up.

Gran Turismo 4

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Sony**
Developer: **Polyphony Digital**



Can anything come close to *GT4*? With 500-odd car types and over 100 tracks, creator Kazunori Yamauchi could probably be diagnosed as an obsessive-compulsive. Still, his attention to detail remains, and the controls are better than the competition, including *Forza Motorsport* or *Enthusia*. A popular touch at E3 was GT Photo mode, which enables players to take and print out in-game shots of their favourite cars.

Devil May Cry 3

Format: **PS2**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house (Production Studio 1)**













DMC3 is actually _DMC0_, preceding the original and chronicling a younger, more tousled Dante's battle against his wayward brother and tidy dress codes

Devil May Cry was a ravishing revelation. *Devil May Cry 2* was a technically flawed attempt to invent the goth Matrix, and thus flopped miserably. Many placed the blame with producer Tsuyoshi Tanaka, a former journalist (the shame!) who turned out to be a poor replacement for the inspiration and experience of Shinji Mikami. Tanaka remains at the helm for *DMC3*, but he has taken his critics seriously and seems to be learning fast.

Devil May Cry 3 retains the frantic action bias of the second game, but now allied to the original's wit and assurance. Capcom is definitely attempting to push Dante as an iconic character: an opening cinematic features the silver-haired showman nonchalantly dispatching a posse of scythe-wielding assailants by surfing on their backs and shooting pool balls through the air while chomping on a pepperoni pizza slice. It is, in one of the new on-screen encouragements, 'dope'. As if his signature velvet cape wasn't enough, this time around Dante sports a range of customisable costumes including – calm down, ladies – an option for him to go topless.

Capcom's big innovation for *DMC3* is the ability to select from a range of fighting styles before each mission. So far, these include the Gunslinger (enabling multi-directional pistol aiming), Swordmaster (self-explanatory), Trickster (wall run and backflip abilities maximised) and Royal Guard (defensive), although Tanaka promises more styles to come. Swordmaster is the most immediately impressive, allowing Dante to spin his sword like John Bonham twirling a drumstick and perform special moves such as the Million Stab. Anticipating camera complaints resulting from the game's prodigious pace, Capcom will implement a 'back camera' option in the manner of *Resident Evil 4* as a helpful alternative to the regular fixed perspectives.

Enemies are faster, uglier and more numerous thanks to an entirely new engine that allows for the frenzied battles of *DMC2* to be played out in environments that exceed even the original game's imposing island cathedral's atmosphere. The first level features a ten-storey colliseum above a crumbling, gothic, neon-flooded cityscape. The *DMC* universe looks more fashionably dishevelled than ever, although the unremitting Linkin Park-alike score may be too much for some.

Neo Contra

Format: **PS2**
Publisher: **Konami**
Developer: **In-house**

Shattered Soldier disappointed many, and Konami has take its time with the follow-up. *Neo Contra* keeps the three-weapon system, but changes the perspective, adopting a slightly flattened top-down presentation. It's undoubtedly easier and a more measured experience than its predecessor. That's not to say the shooting isn't frenetic; coop mode and boss battles shine as a chance to dust off your lightning reactions.



As well as this three-quarters view, _Neo Contra_ also features some more traditional side-scrolling sections

Gradius V

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Konami**
Developer: **Treasure**

Why, it's almost as if Treasure made a *Gradius* game. Against a backdrop of the skeletons of vast space stations, and in between rhythmical swoops of enemy geometry, Vic Viper fights a generations-old battle by tried and tested means. The branching, user-controlled upgrade system is preserved, but now Options – the drones that surround your ship and echo your fire patterns – are configurable and controllable. It's wonderful.



This being Treasure, the bosses are theatrical and tough. Tough enough to make the twoplayer mode alluring

Final Fantasy XII

With 58 million copies sold, 11 standalone games and one online world, where next for the never-ending saga that is *Final Fantasy*? Well, if Square-Enix's choice of **Yasumi Matsuno** to head up the 150-odd development team is anything to go by, it won't be the same sort of territory we've been in before – although technically the game shares a world with two of Matsuno's previous titles, *Final Fantasy Tactics* and *Vagrant Story*. The latter in particular indicates the vastly different, almost experimental, style of storytelling, dramatic resolution and gameplay his productions present – a stark contrast to the generally predictable progress of the *Final Fantasy* series proper. In concert with co-staffers from his previous works, including character artist Akihiko Yoshida, Matsuno's sensibilities have been transferred to the epic scale of a traditional *Final Fantasy* title – with a result fans of neither works could have expected.

It's an eye-opening mix that was demonstrated, to reassuringly hyperbolic reaction, at E3's first playable showing. The most noticeable aspect is the introduction of a full 3D environment and the provision of camera controls to the player, all the better to appreciate the majestic Mediterranean-style locales (Matsuno's geographical influences often extend to his games' themes, and *FFXII* follows this trend, set against a cross-cultural melodrama). Though separated by lengthy loading screens in the demonstration, these areas – some of which suggest the return of a cohesive overworld, rather than map-based travel – are unbroken by the staccato progress of random battles: enemies are clearly visible to attack or avoid. Interestingly, this means position becomes an important consideration (*FF Tactics* fans take note) with ranged weapons gaining power when used from elevation.

Additionally, your party can be positioned freely around foes to split attacks or draw attention away from weaker members. Surprisingly, other combatants – both allies and foes – can join a battle in progress, lending an unpredictable element to seemingly straightforward encounters.

But this isn't to say that combat is reduced to slash-and-spell button-mashing: the game retains the series' heritage of bewilderingly intricate combat systems. *FFXII*'s is the Gambit system, Gambits being macro-like strategies for the two supporting characters to perform in combat. Gambits on show included mirroring the actions of the player, working on their own initiative or acting defensively with support or shield spells: the final game will feature a broader selection to be bought, fought for or discovered in the course of play.

By delaying the release, Square is at least showing faith in the (obsessive) vision Matsuno's team has for Final Fantasy

According to Matsuno, the main influence for such a radical change is the direct control enabled by online games. As a player of *Ultima Online*, *EverQuest* and *FFXI*, his intention with *FFXII* is to blend the positive aspects of both the online and offline RPG experiences.

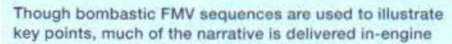
"I play *FFXI* regularly, although my main character is only at level 17," he laughs. "The aspect of such games I like is the ability to form a party and go out on a quest. That's why I call it an offline game with an online feel."

His other cited influence is less prosaic: the commercial pressures of working on such an important title. "What I find hardest is balancing my role as a businessman with being a gamer," he explains. "If I can hit my release date and fulfil 80 per cent of my vision of the game, then I will be happy."

Though there's no doubting the quality and polish of what's currently on show, *FFXII* seems to be experiencing a turbulent development. Square said in May that the game would be delayed from its 2004 release to a more nebulous 'winter 2004-spring 2005', setting Japanese message boards alight with rumours the game had run foul of everything from creative friction to the design being too grandiose for the PS2.

There could be truth in either, and not necessarily with dire consequences. By delaying the release, Square is at least showing faith in the (obsessive) vision Matsuno's team has for *Final Fantasy*: if the E3 showing is indicative of the game as a whole, things are looking bright not just for the franchise's future, but that of the eastern RPG.




Though bombastic FMV sequences are used to illustrate key points, much of the narrative is delivered in-engine

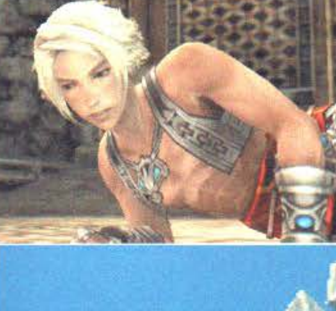


Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Square-Enix**
Developer: **In-house**

Yoshida's character designs are unmistakable, but the bright colours are a nod to previous *FF* artist Tetsuya Nomura, easing the stylistic transition









Blood Will Tell

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **Sega Wow**

Despite being an action title, the game known as *Dororo* in the east has too confined a demo (as it did at TGS) to do justice to Wow's lengthy development of Osamu Tezuka's manga. With little indication of how the story progression or dual-character dynamic will play out, all that's on show are rhythm-action-style combos and a uniquely bleached aesthetic: we remain optimistic the full version has greater depths to appreciate.



Frustratingly, the screens Sega released reveal far more than the demo let on, and cooperative play is always welcome

Nano Breaker

Format: **PlayStation 2**
Publisher: **Konami**
Developer: **Konami Tokyo**

Koji Igarashi maintains that it's oil, not blood, that enemies in his game spew across the scenery; we certainly hope so, since it's literally counted by the gallon. *Nano Breaker* recycles the PS2 *Castlevania* engine with more grace than its marauding machines do their human prey, but gameplay is at once too familiar and less convincing, making it unclear if there's a heart behind all this furiously pumping red.



Your weapon shifts state – from whip to sword to axe – depending on the attack, and can be cycled through in one combo

Killzone

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Sony**
Developer: **Guerrilla/Sony Santa Monica**

And so to PlayStation2's *Halo* killer. One of the most anticipated games of the show, *Killzone* seems to have got the full backing of Sony, being one of the few European-developed games to get the nod from the American office, perhaps because its Santa Monica branch plays an advisory role. First impressions were dominated by the tightness of the game's viewing angle as well as the large size of the onscreen characters, which gives the game a completely different feel to other shooters. The game's heavy metal art direction sets it apart, while another out-there stylistic feature is the way the camera shifts when you reload or prepare to throw grenades. According to the developer, this added vulnerability during such manoeuvres is designed to increase the realism of the overall experience. Well, maybe, but it proved disconcerting for some players. A similar addition is a stamina system, which enables a limited amount of sprinting via an R3 stick-push. Those caveats aside, however, *Killzone* is shaping up to be a game you won't be able to ignore.

Three character classes, ranging from typical heavy weapons guys to assault troops and snipers, were playable in the E3 demo, and there will be an extra one available in the finished game. One key feature is the squad AI, which sees the dreaded Helghast hordes preferring to fight behind cover rather than die hopelessly in front of your gun as in most other games. Level design is also interesting, mixing the usual tense corridors with wider expanses, trenches and many scripted events. And considering the more thoughtful approach being taken, it may well be the quality of such scripted events that will provide the necessary firepower for *Killzone* in its shootout with established franchises such as *Doom*, *Half-Life* and *Halo*.





***Killzone*'s weapons feel satisfyingly heavy, and, in keeping with the understated style of the gameworld's design, they are all ballistic – no comedy plasma rifles here, just hot lead**

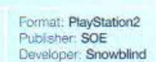
Capcom Fighting Jam

Format: **Arcade, PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **Production Studio 2**



Featuring characters from *SFII*, *SFIII*, *SF Alpha*, *Darkstalkers* and, er, *Warzard*, Capcom's tagteam infighting game has drawn two equally strong reactions from fans: disdain for the shameless sprite recycling (Morrigan will be looking every minute of her 320 years at this stage) and a certainty they'll buy it anyway. If *Fighting Jam*'s mechanics prove as compelling as its nostalgia, then the dated visuals won't be the talking point.

Champions: Return To Arms



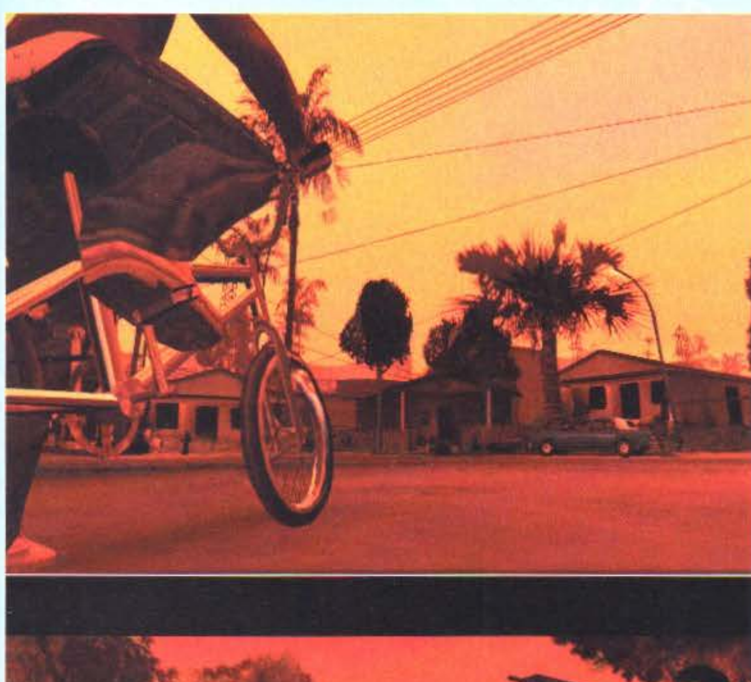
Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **SOE**
Developer: **Snowblind**



Though most European players will have yet to experience the dungeon-storming delights of *Champions Of Norrath* (or the frustration of its sparse internet functionality), the game has already garnered a sequel Stateside. *Return To Arms* adds the expected more of everything, but also refines the original's rough spots, introducing hub-based progression, a new interface, unlockables and stable, fully featured online play.

GTA: San Andreas

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Rockstar** Developer: **Rockstar North**





San Andreas introduces a new 'squad-based' element, in that you can rope in three of your homies to perform drive-bys on rival leaders. Can you do this on a bike? It's not yet clear...

There was no playable code, no video and only a handful of screenshots, yet the merest whisperings of *San Andreas* game details at E3 were enough to eclipse opportunist crime contenders like Eidos' *25 To Life*. The speculation stops here: San Andreas isn't a city, it's a state, comprising re-imaginings of LA, San Francisco and Las Vegas. Rockstar reckons that the play area will be six times that of *Vice City*.

The early-'90s timeframe means the opening stages will immerse the player in west coast gang culture as glorified by Tupac and Snoop. As your empire expands – and the sense of actually controlling a gang, from orchestrating heists to running casinos, will be far more tangible – you'll be mixing with rural rednecks one minute and Hollywood elite the next. In terms of gameplay, think *Manhunt*'s action applied to the *GTA* universe, add extra hand-to-hand combat abilities, new ways to perform the standard carjackings, dual pistols, cycling, swimming... and if the last two new abilities make this seem like an exercise sim, you *will* have to stay fit to stay alive.

Midnight Club 3: Dub Edition

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Rockstar** Developer: **Rockstar San Diego**

Need For Speed Underground's surprise success last year proved that the boy racer dollar is well worth courting. The third outing for Rockstar's online street racing franchise promises to up the ante by teaming with Dub – the hip-hop-influenced 'automotive lifestyles magazine' – to offer infinite possibilities to 'pimp out your ride'.

Rockstar finally seems to have tuned *Midnight Club* graphically to the point where it can compete with *Burnout*, *NFS*, *Ridge* et al, and is celebrating by packing *Dub Edition* with licensed luxury rides such as the Mercedes CL500 and the Cadillac Escalade. All are customisable to the point of pedantry, with decals, Gucci interiors and colossal chrome rims a necessity.

Boasting that no other developer can handle open-city, multiple-route racing with equivalent speed and flair, Rockstar has upped the top speed of its motors to a frightening 200mph while increasing the traffic. *Midnight Club 3* is hardly likely to rival *GT4* for precise realism, but the legion of luxury car culture fetishists out there is a potentially greater audience.



Three American cities, chosen for their automotive heritage, are in the game: Detroit (the original motor city), San Diego (street racing capital) and Atlanta (hip-hop heartland)

God Of War

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Sony** Developer: **Sony Santa Monica**





What's easy to lose sight of in the bloodlust is the intricate architectural and puzzle design – Jaffe is another *Ico* devotee, and its influence lends *GOW* a majesty beyond the butchery

Considering that the brain behind *God Of War* is *Twisted Metal* creator David Jaffe, it's perhaps not surprising it involves plenty of blood, guts and assorted carnage.

Set in the universe of Greek mythology, the action centres on thirdperson combat with the developer boasting an innovative battle system based around chain-bladed weapons. Up to 20 moves will be available as combinations, with the starting move a grab technique. Once accomplished, it will enable players to attack their enemies until they can trigger the sort of finishing moves beloved of *Mortal Kombat* fans – cue fountains of the thick red stuff. There will also be opportunities to transform into the titular god once your combo meter is fully charged. Plot-wise, the action takes place in flashback, with Kratos, the suicidal Spartan warrior you play, attempting to collect Pandora's box from a temple of fiendish traps and other nasties. Combined with the sort of raw humour characteristic of *Twisted Metal*, it should add up to a package which will at least play well in its core US market.

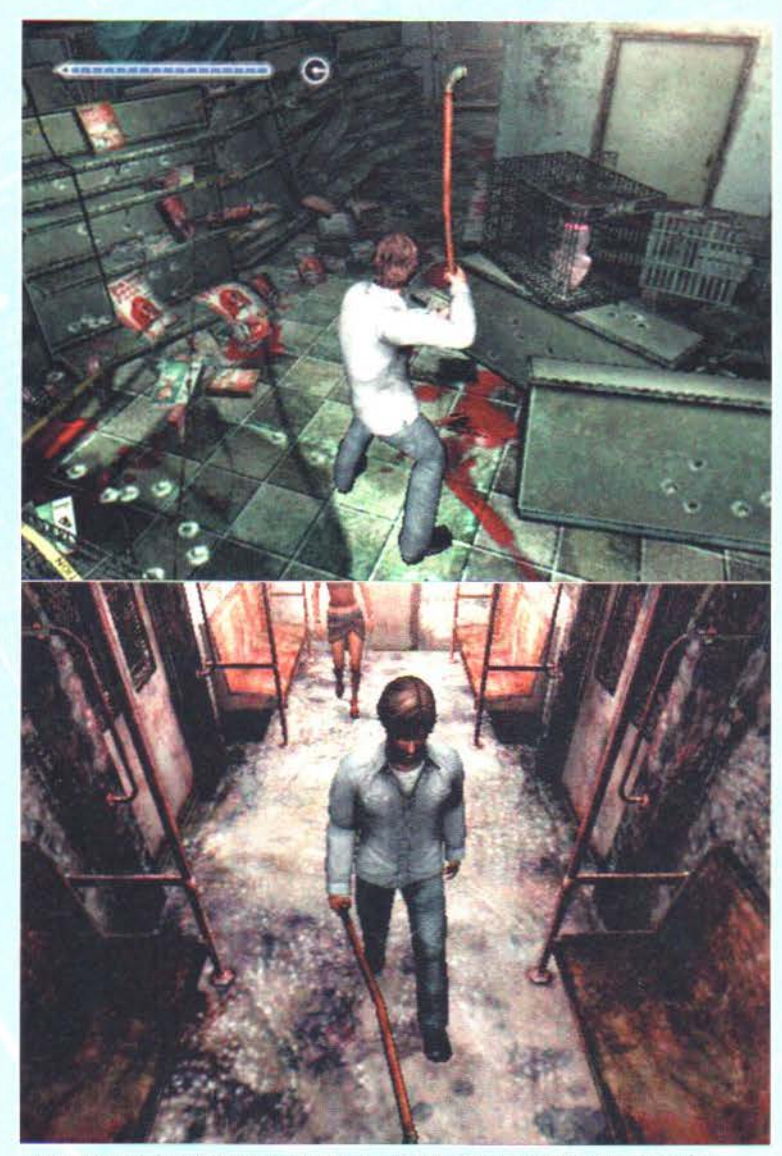
Silent Hill 4: The Room

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Konami** Developer: **In-house**

Normally, when a videogame boasts about its textures, it's hoping you'll get excited about how accurately it reproduces tarmac. What *The Room* boasts is an entirely different proposition: new glue. On top of the blue-beige stumps of livid flesh and the pink-beige tatter of rotted wallpaper, *Silent Hill* is now smeared in strings of sticky saliva, binding enemies in place until they tear free with sickeningly elastic effort.

Enough. *Silent Hill* is a game where describing the gruesome mis-shapes of the enemies constitutes just as much of a spoiler as letting slip an untimely death in a new *Final Fantasy* game. Despite the generous demo on offer, it was hard to piece together any sense of dread.

Despite the new nasties, there are disappointments, particularly in the animation. Many aspects now seem antiquated rather than traditional – limited camera control doesn't solve all the movement problems, and the firstperson view used for inside *The Room* has worryingly poor default controls.



Weapons can be recovered from fallen foes – melee types usually offer a balance of reach versus strength. Eileen has her own special weapons, including her rather flimsy handbag

Jak 3

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **SCEE**
Developer: **Naughty Dog**



Jak 3 is as professional and polished as we've now come to expect from Naughty Dog, but true innovations seemed to be in short supply in the E3 demo



Did Naughty Dog make a mistake in attempting to work elements of *GTA* into its previous *Jak* title? Many gamers thought so, and perhaps the developer agrees, for it has jettisoned such notions for this sequel. Instead you're faced with a more traditional actioner, albeit one filled with just as much gunplay as before.

The big change here is the range of new modes of transport on offer, key among them a flying craft, which you pilot around a massive floating, industrial-looking structure swarming with enemy vehicles, and a sort of dune buggy. The latter is especially handy because much of the game is set in a sandy, desert-like wasteland – a jump control allows you to leap over boulders and marauding, Mad Max-style adversaries.

The usual selection of minigames appear to be in place (one level sees you riding on a lizard's back, chasing smaller creatures around a desert town), and the difficulty level appears to have been decreased – another concession, perhaps, to negative feedback voiced by those who struggled with *Jak II*.

Ratchet & Clank 3: Up Your Arsenal

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **SCEA**
Developer: **Insomniac Games**

Weapons have always been central to the appeal of the *Ratchet & Clank* series, but now, three games in, you're left wondering if there's anything new developer Insomniac can come up with that doesn't seem like simply clutching at straws. This wasn't an aspect we were able to fully investigate at E3, but we can report that the game engine is still fast and fluid, and there are wave upon wave of dumb enemies to pick off however you see fit.

The big deal this time around is multiplayer online combat, which supports up to eight participants with deathmatch options plus capture the flag and a mode entitled Siege, which sees you attempting to take over enemy bases while keeping an eye on your own and making use of the six playing arenas' selection of vehicles.

It's not yet been a year since the last *Ratchet* game, and the evidence so far supports this, with part three's E3 showing appearing rather production-line in terms of content. Perhaps Sony believes that the online play will be enough of a selling point for the game.





It looks great and it plays solidly – just like both of the previous *Ratchet* games, in fact. Will online play be enough to see that the series goes out with a bang?

Monster Hunter

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house**

Here's the answer to the only question that matters: probably. Capcom isn't yet in a position to make any kind of guarantee, but a number of factors mean there's a much better chance of *Monster Hunter* making it online in Europe than there was for *Resident Evil Outbreak*. Which is a very tantalising prospect.

With an unrivalled sense of the actual outdoors, *Monster Hunter* gives you endless mountain vistas and grubby, barky bushes to crouch under while you await your prey. Missions are similar offline and online – collect some specific mushrooms, kill a certain number of raptors, bring back some perfectly cooked meat, all within a generous time limit. Combat is bloody and brutal, controlled with sweeps of the right stick, and elaborate clothes and weapons can be hewn from the spoils you drag back.

Satisfying but limited in singleplayer, the powerful sense of character, community and place in the networked game mean there's a good chance *Monster Hunter* could blossom into a phenomenon of *Phantasy Star Online* proportions.







As well as health, you'll have to keep an eye on stamina as you sprint and jump, and use whetstones on your weapons as they gradually become blunt

Death By Degrees

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Namco**
Developer: **In-house**



It's striking that Namco has pulled back from calling the game *Nina*. *Tekken*'s recognition clearly isn't what it once was

In marketing terms it seems a shoe-in: take the sexiest character from *Tekken* and make a story-based beat 'em up. Add a novel X-ray vision system for the targeting of bones and internal organs in order to inflict an accurate one-hit deathblow on the bad guys.

And, for good measure, include a tutorial mode in which Nina Williams wears the smallest bikini possible. Oh, and don't forget some good old *DOA* wiggle.

Well, nice ideas, but on this showing Namco's got a long way to go to pull the trick off. The biggest issue, surprisingly, is control. Using the right analogue for triggering combat moves should be fine (it's worked in plenty of other similar games, such as *Grabbed By The Ghoulies*), but in this case sluggish animation combined with weak collision detection makes moving around the environment a task, let alone targeting the correct enemy.

Combine such failings with a largely uninspired plot and scenery and the newly formed team behind *DBD* seems to have its work cut out.

Shadow Of Rome

Format: **PlayStation2** | Publisher: **Capcom** | Developer: **Production Studio 2**

The *Onimusha* series has been a huge success in Japan, but less popular in the west. Capcom believes its setting may be alienating, so **Keiji Inafune** has created this Roman romp to attract a significant American and European audience.

The game certainly has epic pretensions, with the murder of Julius Ceasar forming part of the plot. "In one way you could say you were learning something," says Inafune, a little ambitiously, of the story's fact/fiction blend. The gladiatorial elements we played weren't exactly Shakespeare: you jostle for weapons hurled into the arena by the crowd, and proceed to pummel your opponents. The idea is fun to begin with but limited by clunky movement. Playing as the alternative stealthy character, Octavius, the insensitive controls could serve to frustrate players during what are otherwise cleverly constructed scenarios requiring disguise and evasion. A video showed chariot racing and mass battles which looked more fun than the sections we got to play, so expectations remain high.

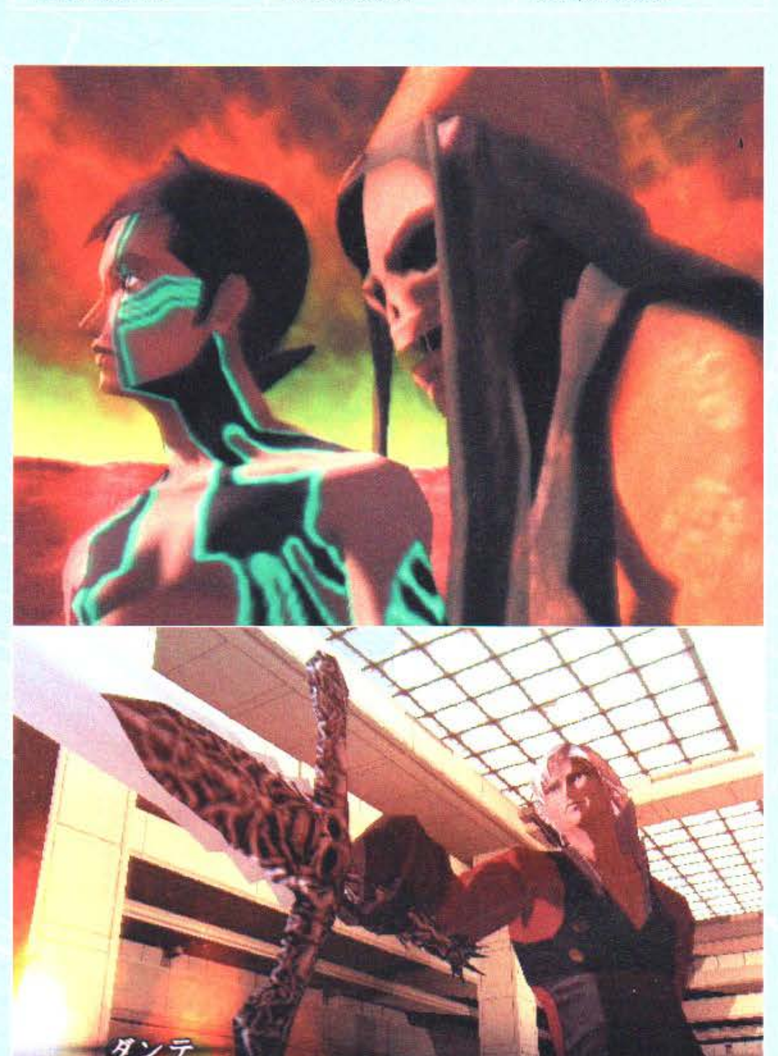




While Octavius (top) must use unsporting methods to dispatch foes, fighter Agrippa (above) does so with considerably more spectacle. Capcom clearly believes westerners love this stuff

Shin Megami Tensei: Nocturne

Format: **PlayStation2** | Publisher: **Atlus USA** | Developer: **In-house**



Though he's arguably never looked better than decked out in Kaneko's razor-sharp lines, Dante plays a minor role in *Nocturne*, only muscling in for one of the new dungeons

The eye-catching PS2 incarnation of Atlus' occult RPG series has tantalised western fans for almost two years, with Atlus USA proving evasive on the localisation issue. But though the series' traditional cast – devils, deaths and gods from every possible religion, a tyrannical creator and a slightly sympathetic portrayal of Lucifer Morningstar – won't do it any favours, a North American release has at last been confirmed.

Though it's unclear if the game's content and complexity will remain uncut, a positive note is this release as the 'Maniacs' version, sold as a full-price special edition in Japan, sporting extra areas and a (throwaway) cameo from *Devil May Cry*'s Dante.

Of more interest than the petulant demon-hunter, though, is the opportunity to see series artist Kazuma Kaneko's unique design in lovingly modelled 3D. Newcomers may also be pleasantly surprised by *Nocturne*'s intelligent, if labyrinthine, plotting, and the freedom to throw your lot in with any of the game's disparate dogmas or strike out on your own moral path.

Sly 2: Band Of Thieves

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEA** Developer: **Sucker Punch**

The original *Sly Cooper* had style and charm to spare, but never managed to steal all the hearts it seemed set to; its cult success, however, has given Sucker Punch a second chance to get it right. The initial concern is that it's carjacked the *GTA* bandwagon (as did stablemate *Jak & Daxter*'s sequel) – open environments replace the level-by-level style of old, and a leaner, meaner Sly now packs combos.

Thankfully, *Band Of Thieves* has retained the original's feel – Sullivan-Bluth does The Saint – and refocused the gameplay along with the redesign, emphasising thieving over double-jumping. Each level presents a heist to be set up, pulled off, and escaped in a string of knowing film and game pastiches.

Sly remains the acrobatic star of the game, but his accomplices Bentley the turtle and Murray the hippo are now playable characters. Combining the trio's complimenting abilities – Bentley is a demolitions expert and Murray the muscle – is the key to success, and though heist plans are predetermined, the levels suggest emergent possibilities.

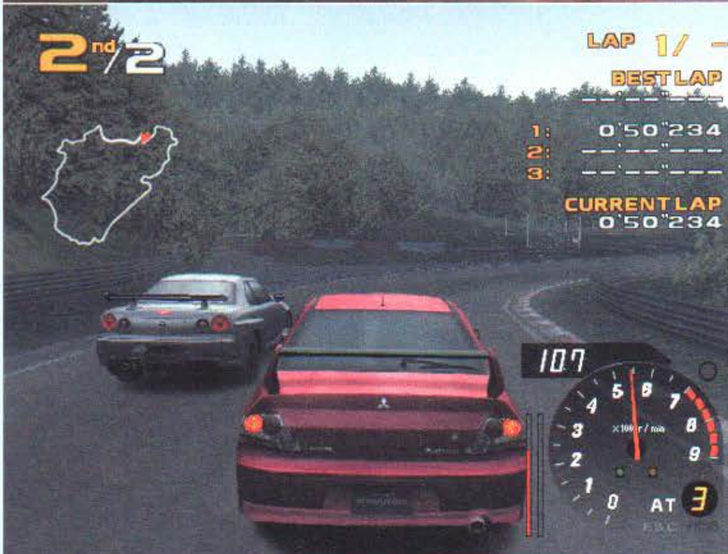


***Band Of Thieves*' sweeping vistas promise all the detail and physics of Sly's first outing, but, courtesy of an entirely rewritten engine, none of the slowdown that occasionally marred it**

Enthusia: Professional Racing

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Konami** Developer: **In-house**





It looks beautiful, of course, and the vehicle modelling is determinedly *correct*, but *Enthusia*'s dedication to the mechanics of realism are in danger of stifling the palpable 'feel' of racing

Contrary to its unusual title, there was little enthusiasm for Konami's new racer at E3. Produced by former *Rage Racer* man Manabu Akita, *Enthusia*'s aim is to provide a doggedly realistic racing experience. Yet in its current form, the game conveys little of *Gran Turismo 4*'s bite and it appears to eschew pre-race tinkering or the idea of a lengthy career mode. Instead, *Enthusia*'s USP is a 'visual gravity system', manifested in a gauge at the bottom of the screen that depicts the 'G' exerted on your vehicle at moments of stress. It suggests how much brake or gas you should apply and where your tyres should be pointing during a drift to achieve the perfect corner. This makes for a sterile experience – surely in a racing game you learn how to achieve optimum performance by sight and feel?

The idea of randomly generated tracks, forcing you to drive instinctively instead of relying on memory, is exciting, but it will onl apply to the desert levels. As things stand, it's difficult to see how any number of accurately modelled, licensed vehicles will invigorate *Enthusia*.

Rise Of The Kasai

Format: **PS2**
Publisher: **SCEA**
Developer: **Bottlerocket**

The lukewarm reception afforded to SCEA's arthouse brawler *The Mark Of Kri* was widely rumoured to have nixed its intended trilogy; news followed that the development team had left Sony's San Diego studio. Happily, E3 confirmed the second rumour and proved the first to be greatly exaggerated. Now operating as a Sony thirdparty, the team has been developing this follow-up since early 2003.

Rau's younger sister Tati takes a playable role in *Rise Of The Kasai* – left somewhat maladjusted after her attempted sacrifice by the Kasai cult, she has grown into a rebellious thrill killer with a suite of finishing moves even more grisly than her bearlike brother's. Much of the game will see the two playing cooperatively, with the other sibling controlled either by AI or a second player online.

Larger levels, the introduction of boss fights, and an overhauled archery mechanic that allows ducking behind cover will address player feedback, but most of *Kri*'s fans will have already got what they wanted: the series' continuation.

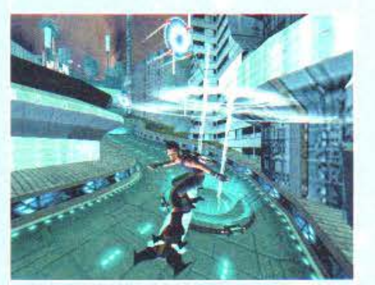


Bottlerocket has hinted that the relationship between Rau and Tati has become somewhat frosty, which should drive much of *Rise Of The Kasai*'s time-period-jumping narrative along

EyeToy: Anti-Grav

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **SCEA**
Developer: **In-house**

E3 saw debut of the first EyeToy games from outside London Studio. *Sega Superstars* is an obvious – though charming – application, but *Anti-Grav* is entirely more ambitious. A hoverboard racer resembling *TrickStyle*, you control the board with your body. Even after a lengthy calibration, and played against a blank wall, the game was having difficulty mapping movements, however, which made it impossible to assess its merits.



Another victory for EyeToy? Don't even think about suggesting that this might just be easier to play with a joypad...

Samurai Legend Musashi

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Square-Enix**
Developer: **In-house**

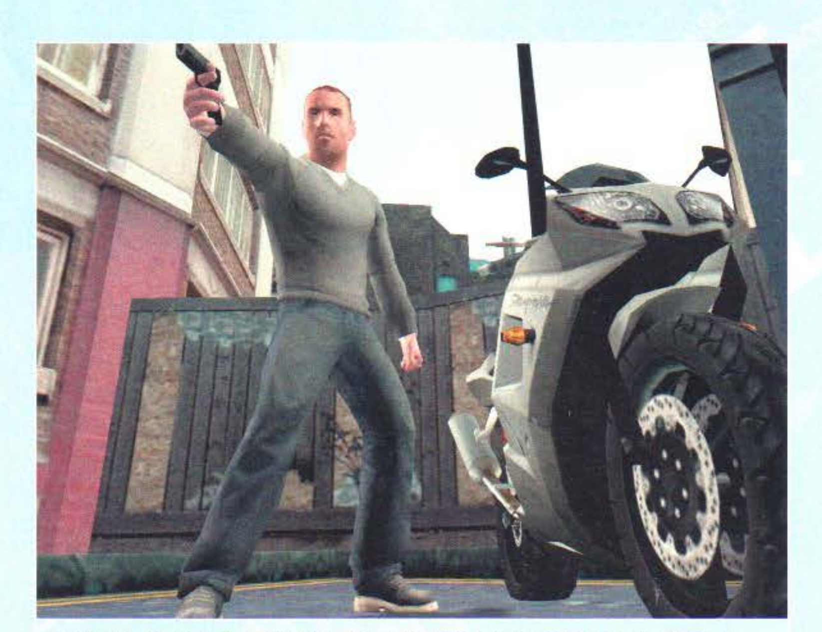
Essentially a follow-up to PS1 title *Brave Fencer Musashi*, this is a slash 'em up with slight platforming overtones. The most obvious upheaval here is the graphical style: Square-Enix has opted for a bold type of cel shading which is pronounced further by the size of your playable character. Unfortunately the basic levels shown off at E3 didn't really do the title any favours; later sections look to offer more satisfying gameplay.



As well as human-esque enemies, the game also features a selection of cute, pseudo-steampunk robotic adversaries

The Getaway: Black Monday

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **SCEE**
Developer: **In-house (Team Soho)**



Bikes are a major new addition to *The Getaway* garage, but you can't help feeling that it's two years behind the *Grand Theft Auto* series with some of its 'innovative' new features

Glasgow, Birmingham and Liverpool all wanted a piece, but ultimately *The Getaway*'s sequel was awarded to London – Team Soho spent five years building the damned city and wasn't ever likely to start again from scratch. Instead, the developer has concentrated on opening up London's interiors, railways (including the Tube) and waterways. That also means more pedestrians on the streets and a greater range of vehicles to steal. The challenge will be overhauling the stealth and shooting sections that proved so frustrating last time. A free camera and emphasis on close-up combat (courtesy of Eddie, who favours crowbars and pool cues) are a good start.

Team Soho is again putting emphasis on the storyline. Hopefully, the scriptwriters can conjure a more believable scenario than the Hammond/Jobson face-off with their new cast: Mitch, a special ops officer; Sam, a thief and hacker; and bad boy Eddie. Sony presented *Black Monday* to the Cannes festival as the pinnacle of game/film convergence, so its sub-Lock, Stock stylings will need to be sorted.

Snowblind

Format: **PC, PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Eidos**
Developer: **Crystal Dynamics**

An escalating conflict in dark near-future Asia is the setting for Crystal Dynamics' firstperson shooter, in which various urban warzones must be reclaimed with heavy weaponry and bio-augmented abilities. If it sounds a little *Deus Ex*, that's because it was originally designed to be a spin-off from Ion Storm's licence, but has since gone its own way – or at least as much of its own way as the gritty cyberpunk FPS theme allows.



Your squad act largely on their own initiative, but you bear responsibility for keeping them alive in firefights

STALKER: Shadow Of Chernobyl

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **THQ**
Developer: **GSC Gameworld**

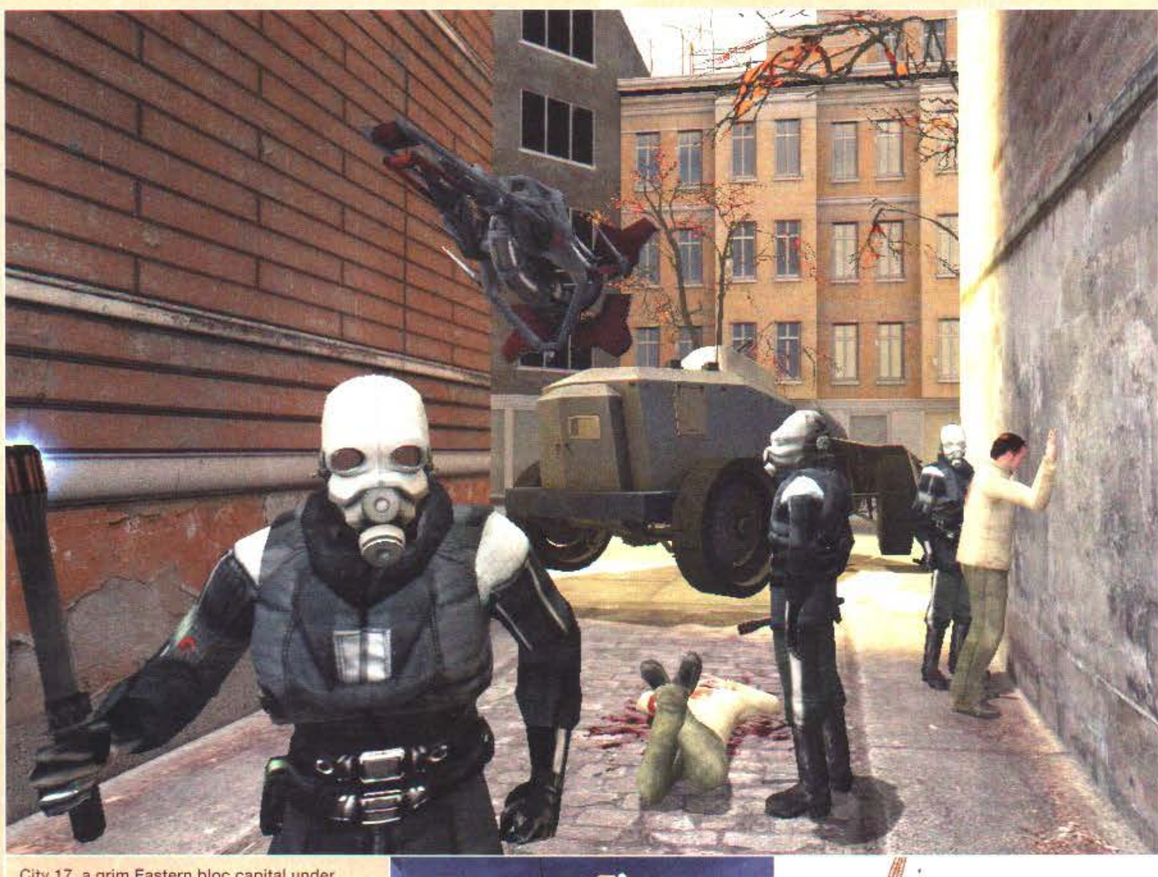
GSC Gameworld was playing Scheherazade at E3, spinning yet more stories about one of the most captivating PC game ideas ever proposed. Whether the rumours of 'unlimited' players for the multiplayer maps actually come true – which, of course, they won't – it's still cheering to see so much creativity and ambition thrown around with abandon. The countdown has begun, and soon we'll see how much has become reality.



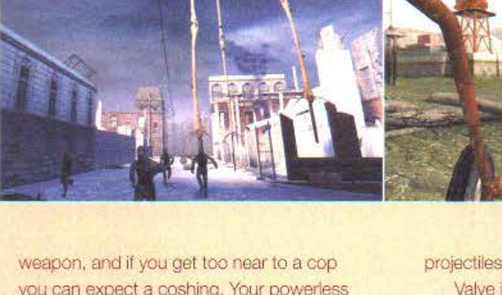
This was a popular multiplayer PC title at the show, with plenty of sniping going on

Half-Life 2

Format: **PC, Xbox**
Publisher: **Vivendi Universal**
Developer: **Valve**



City 17, a grim Eastern bloc capital under a brutal tyranny, is Gordon Freeman's first port of call. However, *Half-Life 2* rapidly unfolds to become a truly universal epic



One of E3's disappointments was the lack of a playable *Half-Life 2* demo, although you can sympathise with Valve for being ultra-protective, especially after the code theft scandal. Instead, Valve's Erik Johnson showed us a lengthy video combining footage old and new, concluding with a teasing glimpse of *Counter-Strike* running on Source and an affirmation that *Half-Life 2* will be released in the summer. What counts as summer in Seattle? We suggest planning a sickie for September 9.

Firstly, we were introduced to City 17, the crumbling, totalitarian metropolis patrolled by Combine Metrocops. It's the game's opening level, you don't have a weapon, and if you get too near to a cop you can expect a coshing. Your powerless situation forces you to absorb the city's atmosphere, and appreciate the referential wit that sets *Half-Life 2* apart from its humourless FPS rivals. Mostly, though, *Half-Life 2* is all about spectacular firefights against grotesque enemies and hordes of heavily armed troops.

As the colossal robotic Striders stalk City 17's hapless inhabitants, anyone who had nightmares about The Tripods as a kid is suddenly transported back. Even the 'manipulator gun', whose secondary fire sucks up random objects such as oil drums or furniture, and launches them as projectiles, seems ineffectual. Time to run.

Valve is rightly proud of its vehicle physics, a rusted buggy with mounted machine-gun proving to be a smart way to zip around the coastal levels while firing at enemy hoverbots and the rollermines they drop in your path. Ascending a shipyard crane, it's possible to grasp a container and, with a little momentum, swing it into a phalanx of advancing enemies like you're playing human skittles. That's the Havok code in full effect. Again.

This was the merest of glances at a game that will be colossal in scope, combining scripted set-pieces with immense player freedom.



Doom 3

Format: **PC, Xbox**
Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **Id (PC), Vicarious Visions (Xbox)**

A rare GDC address by John Carmack earlier this year saw id's superprogrammer comment on gaming hardware's exponential one-upmanship – something dear to both his heart and project. The *Doom 3* engine, once so far ahead of the curve as to have passed over the horizon, looks considerably more mortal four years on (as Carmack had predicted).

It's also provided more time to consider that although *Doom 3* is posed as a reimagining of the original, it's not so much Knee-Deep In The Dead as occasionally ankle-deep. Intimately horrific encounters in tight corridors replace the stampedes through stadium-sized concourses. The game moves at the oily, shuddering pace of a bad dream, not the twitch-dash rush required to complete levels under par. If *Doom* was ever a film homage, then this is a step back from Aliens to Alien.

But you knew that already: what's remarkable, then, is how id has stuck to its shotguns on the vision for the game while the genre has massively expanded around them. It puts *Doom 3* in the curious position of being almost outmoded – in scope and visuals, if not in technology – yet also the most important title id has produced in terms of escaping its self-imposed pigeonhole.

Vicarious Visions' Xbox port was on show, and though its idiosyncrasies baffled some players (as was also the case with *Killzone*, see page 54) the limited demo proved popular. The Xbox version's coop mode was neither implemented nor up for discussion, and at this stage it's difficult to get a feel for how it could work within the 'cinematic' campaign. Tense gunfights between impenetrable shadows and chunks of cover, however, suggest both versions' fourplayer deathmatches could be an interesting proposition.

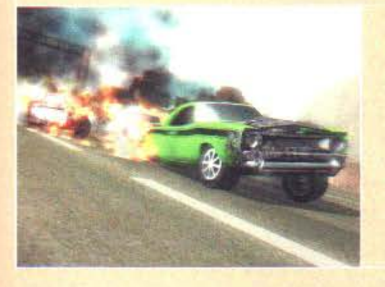


Revenants – patently the all-time greatest FPS enemies after *Hexen*'s Dark Bishops – will be making a reappearance, as will *Doom*'s traditionally organic hell-world environments once the fight is taken out of the UAC facilities



Crash 'n' Burn

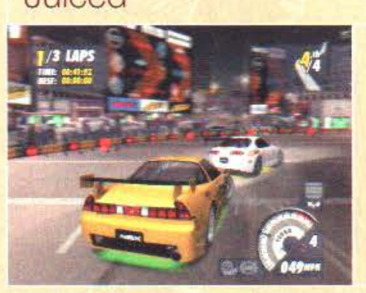
Format: **PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Eidos**
Developer: **Climax**



It's a long way from being a *Burnout* clone – long enough that you wonder why the assumption was made. It's lacking *Burnout*'s gleaming visuals, but the combination of bruising circuit races, debris dodging, recognisable city settings and car customisation puts some distance between it and the competition. The uncharitable will say it's more a case of pick 'n' mix than crash 'n' burnout, but the net result is still fresh.

Juiced

Format: **PS2, Xbox, PC**
Publisher: **Acclaim**
Developer: **Juice Games**



With modded car racing now firmly established as a viable genre, it seems that publishers are pushing the form to see how far it can be taken. Enter *Juiced*, with over 50 licensed vehicles and thousands of real-world mods to purchase for your motor, from body decals to in-car entertainment. Online races will be available on every platform, and the game looks capable enough graphically. More on these pages soon.

GoldenEye: Rogue Agent

Format: **GC, PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **EA**
Developer: **In-house (EA LA)**



AI opponents will fight as aggressively as you do, taking hostages and rushing in for melee knife attacks. You are an internationally wanted supervillain, after all, so they're out to get you



EA has sensibly destroyed all references to this game as *GoldenEye 2* in order to shirk comparison with Rare's seminal N64 FPS. Not that *Rogue Agent* is a duffer – it was one of the smarter console shooters at E3 – but its immaculate sheen makes it an extension of the *Everything Or Nothing* aesthetic rather than a tribute to the groundbreaking gameplay of *GoldenEye*.

Rogue Agent's hook is that you get to play not as 007, but as a baddie whose story appears to be loosely based on MI6 defector Alec Trevelyan from the GoldenEye movie. The presence of Auric Goldfinger, Dr No, Oddjob and a number of classic Bond locations such as Blofeld's volcano and the Moonraker launch pad add to the allure.

Play is fast-paced, with aggressive enemies contributing to the sense of panic – they'll team up to corner you, or shoot out glass panels to get a clear shot. EA has contrived an acronym for its AI (emotional, visceral, intelligent, learning: EVIL, geddit?) to emphasise the way that adversaries will get wise to your tactics and attempt to use them against you. Stealth is not an option, as you'll be hunted down mercilessly. Corridors are eschewed in favour of open arenas with plenty of obstacles arranged to enhance the game's strategy. Most levels also feature hidden 'death traps' – switches or pulleys that trigger a destructive event (such as a shuttle launch) to dispatch a clutch of enemies at once. This doesn't sound like a notable development until you consider the multiplayer possibilities.

In fact, multiplayer is where *Rogue Agent* really comes alive, offering deathmatch, team deathmatch and coop options for eight players over Xbox Live or PS2 online. EA has fashioned another ruthlessly efficient Bond game, but the depth of its multiplayer suggests it could be something more besides.

LOTR: The Third Age

Format: **GC, PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **EA**
Developer: **In-house**



You can't fault this Rings RPG's thoroughness in lifting Japanese RPG mechanics wholesale, but the timing leaves something to be desired. In a show that saw the likes of *Fable*, *Bard's Tale* and even *Final Fantasy* attempt to expand the genre, *Third Age* appears routine and charmless. Beefy production values don't excuse self-defeating conservatism, though EA could well predict that it doesn't need to, given the gilt-edged licence.

Headhunter Redemption

Format: **PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **Amuze**



Headhunter's return remains a mixed blessing. It's confirmed that an older and wider Jack Wade will be occasionally playable, though grunge-chic protégé Leeza X takes the starring role. The motorcycle will not be returning, nor will much of the original's stealth. This concentration on run-and-gun action may give *Redemption* the cohesion of polish its forebear lacked, but from the demo, at least, it's a less exciting prospect.

Destroy All Humans!

Format: **PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **THQ**
Developer: **Pandemic Studios**

It starts with the cows, because that's what the conspiracy theorists *want* you to believe. *Destroy All Humans!* is so steeped in 1950s B-movie pulp that the game begins with that most typical of xenomorph recons: cattle abduction.

With that under his space belt, Crypto – a textbook Grey and a one-alien army sent by the Furon race to clear an Earth-sized path for the imminent invasion of the galaxy – can research himself a little closer to understanding just what makes humans tick, so that he can snuff them out as painfully and loudly as possibly.

However, while Crypto possesses the kind of weapons that look like they've been torn from the back pages of a creature feature comic – the Quantum Deconstructor, the Cortex Scanner, and the Zap-O-Matic laser gun, capable of reducing humans to charred mounds – he also possesses the ability to impersonate any one of the population if he can get close enough, assuming their appearance before using his psychokinesis to fling the redundant body out of sight.

Impersonate a general, and you can infiltrate a war council to dish out a strategic suckerpunch of a diversion – "There ain't no aliens here, nup." You'll even end up going as far as impersonating the president, addressing the nation and rebutting claims of an impending alien invasion. And if this sounds like too patient a course of action, there's the option to body snatch or hypnotise a hapless inhabitant.

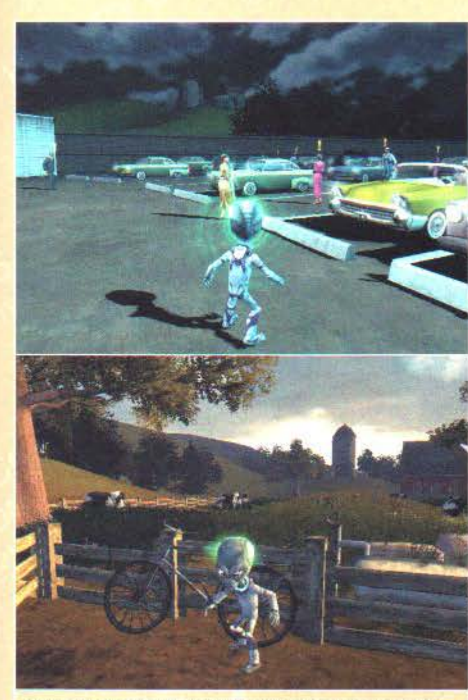
Of course, the element of wanton destruction isn't a half-measure. Crypto can gunfight his way through a military blockade before setting up a wall of fire that halts tanks in their tracks. And if the on-foot initiative isn't successful, there's always recourse to Crypto's UFO, stocked with cutting-edge death-tech, such as the tower-quaking Sonic Boom.

Thankfully, the world around you is fully destructible and buoyed by a robust physics engine, allowing you to Destroy All Buildings, too. Your UFO attacks have a blast radius bigger than that of any crop circle, sending a streetful of cars flipping like pennies as you unleash a mangling wave of destruction on the population.

While the three-pronged approach – stealth through impersonation, on-foot combat and UFO-based ultraviolence – seems to be a mix 'n' match offering open to the player's own whim, it's unclear just how free roaming the levels will be, and how funnelled and prompted the missions are that take place within them.

One thing's for sure, though: it'll definitely start with the cows.







'One giant step on mankind' is the game's tagline, and it's one of the few pieces of E3 promo blurb to show any amount of wit. The eerie, sneering voiceover that accompanies the game's excellent trailer bodes well

NARC

Format: **PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Midway**
Developer: **In-house**

Video-only at the show, the *State Of Emergency*-engined reworking of Midway's 1988 classic appears more involved than its donor title – we can't help feeling it's a missed opportunity for a knowing '80s-excess homage, pastel jumpsuits and all. Unlike the original, Winners can now Do Drugs should they choose to be a corrupt cop, and gravel-voice talent includes Michael Madsen, Michael Wincott and Ron Perlman.



NARC **references its arcade roots with predictable opponents and generous health provision. Which isn't a criticism**

Star Wars: Republic Commando

Format: **PC, Xbox**
Publisher: **LucasArts**
Developer: **In-house**

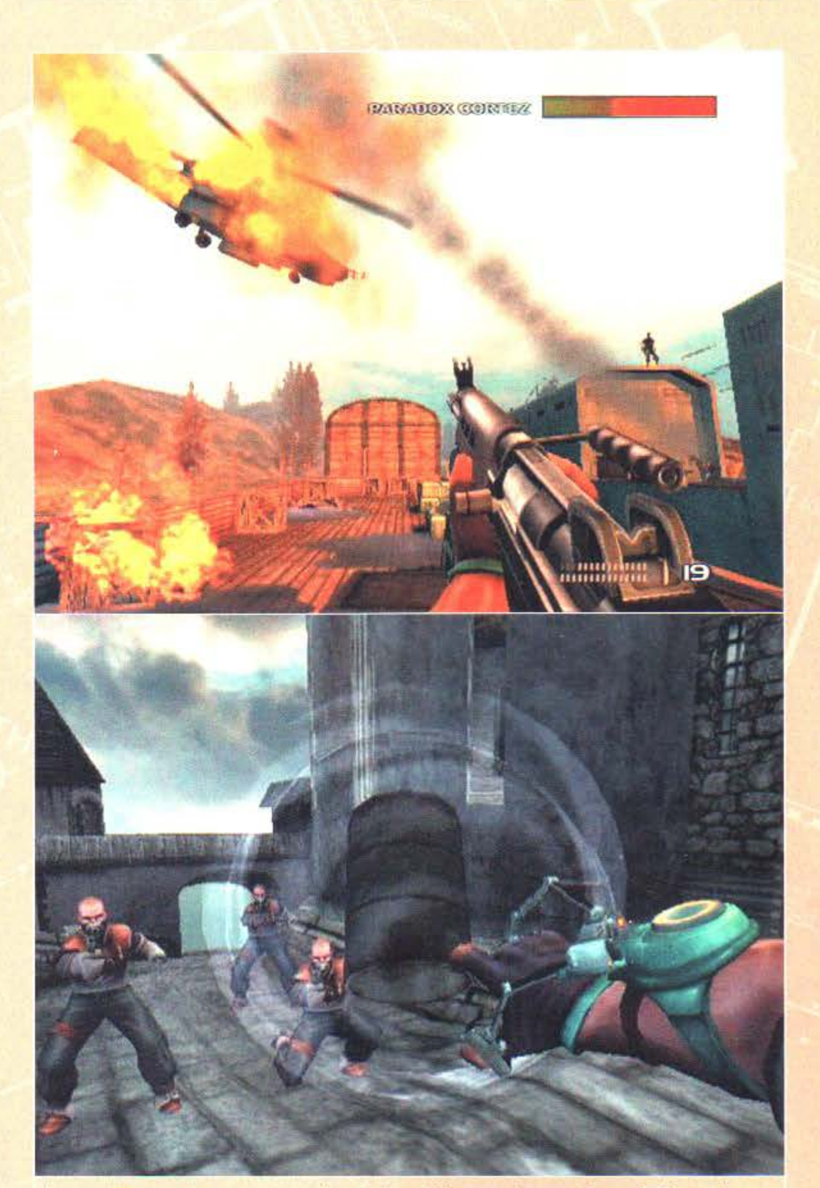
The challenge with this game was always going to be perfecting the balance between the active and the tactical. Things are certainly looking promising, with troopers getting on smartly with the job in hand rather than bogging you down with micro-man-management tasks. The weapon set, though limited, is hefty and satisfying, and the pared-down Star Wars chic adds crisp and striking detail to the plain corridors.



The ***Metroid Prime*****-style visor is both atmospheric and smartly informative**

TimeSplitters: Future Perfect

Format: **PS2, Xbox, GC** | Publisher: **EA** | Developer: **Free Radical Design**



It was difficult to discern any immediate obvious differences between *Future Perfect* and previous *TimeSplitters* iterations, although the open environments hint at grander ambition

Safe within the embrace of EA, the latest chapter of the *TimeSplitters* experience is already shaping up nicely. Only one singleplayer level was available, but this demonstrated the rock-solid control and smooth movement characteristic of the series. Set on a moving train and beset by an attack helicopter, à la *Soldier of Fortune*, players take up the reins as Cortez, the slightly cheesy, yet hard-as-nails '70s hero from the first two games. Help, if required, was provided by a coop AI character – who in keeping with the time-travelling concept of the game was Cortez himself. Style-wise, there was more than a hint of *Time Crisis*, both in the large size of onscreen characters, as well as in the way enemies popped out of the scenery. Perhaps a reaction to Free Radical's other more edgy *Second Sight* title, *TimeSplitters*' art direction seems to have embraced the arcade side, too, with a strong colour palette and chunky graphics in evidence. Also available was the multiplayer version of the game, which supports up to 16 players. Promising stuff.

Battlefield: Modern Combat

Format: **PS2, Xbox** | Publisher: **EA** | Developer: **Digital Illusions**

Bringing the joys of vehicle-based firstperson shooting to the unwashed console hordes, Digital Illusions' reworking of its online PC hit sees the hardware advance to the modern era. Taking the side of either the US, the Chinese or the newly formed Middle East Coalition, players spawn into a world littered with armoured cars, tanks, helicopters, fixed gun positions and artillery pieces. Access to some of these is organised by character class, with the five options ranging from heavy assault to sniper, special ops, assault, and engineer. One neat feature of the game's online-only capability is the promotion system: there will only be a certain amount of ranks available, with the relative performance of players constantly switching their status. Equally, a certain rank will be required to gain access to specific vehicles. Some more basic work remains to be done on the game, however. Designed to support large scale 24-player levels, this was limited at E3 to a couple of smaller levels. The PS2 version, in particular, felt stripped down, and the framerate could do with some optimisation.





***Modern Combat* may need to limit its ambitions if it is to succeed as an online console game. The potential is great, but currently it's little more than *SOCOM* with vehicles**

Pariah

Format: **PC, Xbox**
Publisher: **Hip**
Developer: **Digital Extremes**




Though *Pariah*'s setting is by the numbers, its second protagonist, prisoner Karina J (not shown) is promised to be a less conventional gaming heroine



After years of working on *Unreal Tournament*, developer Digital Extremes has decided it's time to get its own IP. It's still concentrating on what it does best, though; a firstperson shooter with vehicles and extensive multiplayer elements, *Pariah* also uses the Unreal engine. And it shows. *Pariah* certainly is a very pretty game, with plenty of shader effects to create hyper-realistic water, fiery explosions and atmospheric cinematics.

The multiplayer is shaping up nicely too, thanks to the combination of bouncy physics and multi-positional vehicles. What's less clear is the quality of the singleplayer experience. With ten months to go, there's little gameplay visible, beyond the usual shoot-and-collect-keys approach. The backstory promises a race against time to escape a virus-ridden prison, with a fellow survivor you must keep alive throughout before it's cleansed by a 50-megaton explosion. Other featured elements include cooperative squad AI for enemies and the ability to customise your weapons with energy cores as you progress.

Second Sight

Format: **GC, PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Codemasters**
Developer: **Free Radical**

Ever since last year's E3, 2004 was always going to be the year of picking things up without touching them. Even though no one but Russian pirates has yet got their hands on *Half-Life 2*'s 'manipulator', both *Second Sight* and *Psi Ops* are selling themselves – and successfully so – as games where you can drop dustbins on people's heads from afar.

Lumping them together is far from fair, however. *Second Sight*'s strength is its multi-layered plot, which flicks back and forth between present-day psi-powered asylum breakouts and earlier running-and-gunning army missions, helping to vary the pace of the game. It's let down by the hammy dialogue and clumsy prompts. To solve the mystery of your amnesiac mind and bludgeoned face, you'll be using your enhanced brain to astrally project, charm suspicious guards, heal, and, of course, drop dustbins on people's heads from afar.

For now, the solid controls combine well with the un-rationed psychic tricks. Hopefully the gunplay and puzzles will be up to their high standards.





Psi moves, such as the Psi Blast (left) and Healing (above) drain energy from your psi meter. This gradually refills, which in effect provides you with infinite health

Citizen Zero

Format: **PC, Xbox**
Publisher: **TBC**
Developer: **MicroForte**

Australian developer MicroForte's persistent online shooter, built with its proprietary Big World technology, has slipped off the radar several times over its four-year development. Briefly picked up by Microsoft Game Studios, but currently without a publisher, it looked reassuringly solid. Interestingly, its skirmishes involve players cooperating against AI opponents, rather than the player-vs-player battles of *PlanetSide*.



Citizen Zero **is starting to show its age, but its impressive scope should ensure an audience on its eventual release**

Mercenaries

Format: **PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **LucasArts**
Developer: **Pandemic**



Offering a level of freedom absent from most military games, *Mercenaries* ditches strict behavioural realism in favour of allowing you to approach missions in unconventional ways

One of the many thirdperson vehicle-oriented games on show, *Mercenaries* is akin to *GTA* in a warzone, the battlefield in this case being North Korea. Borrowing the deck of cards metaphor from Iraq, the mission is to round up 52 members of the old regime before they can launch a nuclear attack (and we're glad developer Pandemic got those pesky morals sorted out early). Mixing loose controls with crowded interactive environments, the game certainly has an extremely arcadey feel. Any vehicle can be commandeered, with one notable scripted move involving jumping onto the skids of a hovering helicopter before disposing of the pilot over the side, Arnie-style. A more tactical element is provided by a rudimentary reputation system, which will see you playing off the Koreans, Russians and Chinese, while additional weapons become available via an economic model – specific missions are rewarded with cash. It will be in the basic gameplay where *Mercenaries*' ambition will succeed or fail and, at present, control still requires work.

Call of Duty: Finest Hour

Format: **GC, PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **Spark**

Yes, world war two games were more common at E3 than girls in skimpy T-shirts. In some cases, the two were combined, as it seems a model sat astride a tank cannon still works as an advertisement for the joys of war – but no such gimmicks were required for *Call Of Duty*'s console outing. *Finest Hour* shares a sensibility with the PC original, but these are all-new missions, created with an all-new engine.

The game concentrates on individual survival in the midst of battle. We were shown *Finest Hour*'s opening mission, a return to the battle of Stalingrad from the PC game. From the moment you're deposited on the ravaged shore, it's evident Spark has managed to keep the explosive intensity of the original intact. You don't even begin with a weapon, and it's several minutes of kamikaze rushes before you pull one from the hands of a downed colleague.

The number of troops on screen makes *Finest Hour* an impressive achievement. You only have minimal control over your men, but the game invisibly draws you on, so curmudgeonly AI is not an issue.



Spark's primary aim is to engender a feeling of intense pressure. The sheer number of characters on screen simultaneously, both friendly and hostile, is a real achievement

Burnout 3

Format: **PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Electronic Arts**
Developer: **Criterion**

Burnout's new publisher is clearly bringing out the brash best in the game. The delights of Crash mode have been enhanced with a new version that fundamentally puts a bomb in your boot, and the delicious potential of twoplayer, head-on collisions where you both broadside the same junction from opposite directions. Thanks to EA finally cosying up to Xbox Live, players on both consoles will be able to compete online.



There are, as trilogies require, more cars, more tracks and more graphic and gleaming vehicular dismemberment

Area 51

Format: **PS2, Xbox** | Publisher: **Midway** | Developer: **Inevitable Entertainment**



In *Area 51*, not only are the enemies mutants, but you're a mutant too. Naturally, this gives you the opportunity to try out varied attack styles



Although it shares a title with Midway's poor lightgun arcade shooter of yesteryear, the new version of *Area 51* looks more to thoughtful shooters such as *Half-Life* and *Deus Ex* for its inspiration.

The plot, as ever, concerns a viral outbreak in a top-secret research facility. As specialist Ethan Cole, your role is to find out what happened, overcoming all manner of alien invaders and human conspiracies in the process. This somewhat stereotypical backstory aside, *Area 51* provided a surprisingly solid FPS experience, at least in the online deathmatch mode in which it was available at the show.

Less evident, however, were the alien-enhanced mutations you pick up along the way during the singleplayer game. Another promised touch is the ability of the NPCs to help you in a curious sort of partly scripted, partly intelligent manner. And in lieu of any other innovations, it seems likely these will end up the make-or-break feature for a game trying to carve out a reputation in what is already a highly competitive genre.

Brothers In Arms

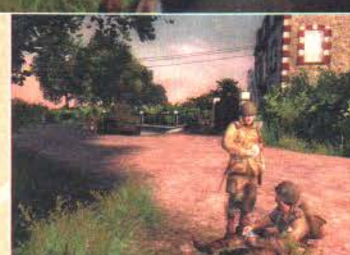
Format: **PC, Xbox** | Publisher: **Ubisoft** | Developer: **Gearbox Software**

With the world war two firstperson shooter currently established – like the jungle war genre – as one of those handful of staples that publishers latch on to at any one time, the race to differentiate is on. While E3's big-screen trailer initially gave the impression that *Brothers In Arms* would follow the Spielbergian cinematic blockbuster route – and it is graphically strong – closer inspection reveals a deeper emotional hook based around immersion in a squad of young troopers and comrades.

Players assume a leadership role, dividing and directing the squad through fairly blunt commands – the game design relies on the readily apparent team AI to sensibly interpret your orders. As such, it's simple to order covering fire or an all-out assault, and see your squad respond without you getting bogged down in the minutia of deployment. Enemies seem to behave similarly and this, combined with the suggested modelling of morale for each soldier, should give *Brothers In Arms* a human dimension not often apparent in squad-based shooters.



Brothers In Arms isn't alone in attempting to humanise its war stories, but it seems more credible than most when asking the player to empathise with the game's characters



ShellShock: Nam '67

Format: **PC, PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Eidos**
Developer: **Guerrilla**



With *ShellShock*'s release looming so close, hopes were high that the game would be available at E3 in an almost finished state. Although the demo was extensive, it's still a little rough around the edges – Guerrilla is likely to be burning midnight oil by the pint over the next few weeks. What is in place is the game's '60s vibe. The soundtrack has plenty of instant recognition and the soldiers sound and swear as they should.

Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers

Format: **PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Acclaim**
Developer: **BattleBorne**



An unconventional spin on the WWII fervour gripping E3, BattleBorne's title drafts the ubiquitous *Dark Alliance* engine into military service. The resulting game is a less knockabout affair than its dungeon-based brethren: if you don't crawl, dodge and conserve ammo like your life depends on it, then even one German will prove that it did. It's a more measured approach that bodes well for the final game.

StarCraft: Ghost

Format: **GC, PS2, Xbox** Publisher: **Vivendi Universal** Publisher: **Blizzard/Nihilistic**

Blizzard's console debut has been a long time coming, but *StarCraft: Ghost* is an ideal vehicle in which to blend the company's renowned strategy and storytelling expertise with thirdperson stealth action courtesy of development partner Nihilistic.

Since we last saw *StarCraft: Ghost*, the implementation of smooth animation, neat graphical effects (such as the invisibility cloak) and the ubiquitous Havok physics component have made it a game to be reckoned with technically.

Psionic powers are a major contribution to heroine Nova's arsenal, but she also performs a range of satisfying stealth moves such as silent kills (executed with a rhythmic button combo) and whatever it is you can call hanging upside down from a horizontal pipe while sniping enemies you can only see by employing your heat-sensing facility. Overall, *StarCraft: Ghost* plays like a slightly more forgiving *Splinter Cell*, while the engaging storyline should satisfy *StarCraft* devotees and newcomers alike.



Nova's animations are remarkably fluid, enhancing the sense of character control. A future as the female Sam Fisher seems assured



Prince Of Persia 2

Format: **GC, PC, PS2, Xbox** Publisher: **Ubisoft** Publisher: **Ubisoft Montreal**



The prince's new, more ruthless persona gives you greater confidence to tackle multiple enemies by chaining moves together in slo-mo



This is a completely different prince," the presenter at the *Prince Of Persia 2*'s E3 booth stressed. Clearly responding to criticism that last year's game under-performed at retail for whatever reason, Ubisoft's meaner, muscled-up prince has ditched the chiffon and acquired a predilection for moves reminiscent of *Mortal Kombat* (as first revealed in **E**137). While the prince decapitates, the combat system also encompasses dual swordsmanship and new slashing attacks launched from walls.

Perhaps the key development, though, is an extension of the time control motif. The prince can now slow combat to chain moves together, resulting in a flurry of flying enemy heads. The prince's other acrobatics – arguably the key strength of the first game – have survived the makeover, and the game seems sound, if melancholy. Whereas last year we had to point unacquainted peers toward a refreshing new title, this year's was mobbed. Me-too violence upping the industry's interest, or simply an excellent game now blessed with a profile? Sadly, we'll never know.

Psi-Ops

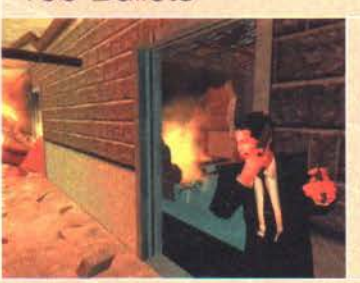
Format: **PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Midway**
Developer: **In-house**



The main cause for concern in *Psi-Ops* is that the game will get in the way of the playing. Toying with the physics – blasting a cupboard door off its hinges, so you jump on and levitate it (and therefore yourself) across a gaping hole – is so much fun that the meat and potatoes of gunplay and switches is something of a comedown. If these humdrum situations respond with the same flexibility, they'll put the game back in gaming.

100 Bullets

Format: **PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Acclaim**
Developer: **In-house**



The much-touted mystery feature of Acclaim's otherwise conventional thirdperson shooter turned out to be a ballistic interpretation of the smart bomb. Building up a 'rage' level allows the player to enter an all-destroying gun ballet, or release it in bursts to bring down individual foes. It's visceral fun, but woefully throwaway compared to the subtleties of Acclaim's other comic-to-game property, *The Red Star*.

The Punisher

Format: **PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **THQ**
Developer: **Volition**

At a time when the line between interrogation and torture is the subject of intense international scrutiny, along comes Volition's take on The Punisher: an adaptation that stays true to the vicious amorality of the comic. Alongside the usual tropes – twin weapons, bullet-time, awkward camera – its claim to fame is the interrogation move, which allows you to grind your gun butt into a prisoner's head until they confess.



Other interrogation techniques use the game's environments – pirhana pools, wood-chippers and sharp, hard kerbs

X-Men Legends

Format: **PC, PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **Raven Software**



Select four X-Men for each mission from a 15-strong cast that includes Storm, Cyclops, and Colossus. Switching between them in battle is a simple matter of pressing the D-pad

X-Men fans have been ill served by games in recent years. *Legends* looks as though it will go a long way toward righting those wrongs with a new storyline drawing on various strains of X-Men comics as well as the movies and cartoon series.

Touted as an action/RPG, *Legends'* depth skews it towards devotees of roleplaying. Playable characters include most of the old favourites, all upgradeable. The idea is to pick a four-mutant team with a range of skills and abilities. You can switch control between characters, while the rest follow the instructions you set for them. While this is definitely one of the fastest, most explosive RPGs we've played, mutant powers don't exist merely for eviscerating enemies – each mission presents a set of more cerebral, environment-specific teasers with a number of solutions. Hemmed in by Sentinels, one of your X-Men may be able to blast through walls, fly over them, teleport or – if you must – eviscerate the enemy hordes with an Xtreme attack. Coop and deathmatch modes only add to this already meaty experience.

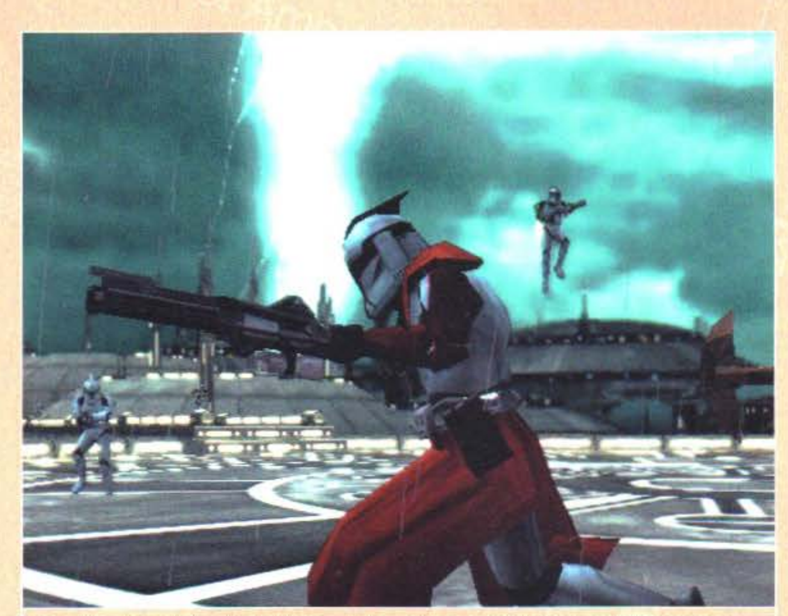
Star Wars Battlefront

Format: **PC, PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **LucasArts**
Developer: **Pandemic**

From humble clones do mighty armies grow. After inauspicious beginnings with the disappointing *Clone Wars*, Pandemic is poised to have a stellar year. Having established its credentials with *Full Spectrum Warrior* (p 98), and shown its ability to generate the freshest IP on show at E3 (*Mercenaries*, p68, and *Destroy All Humans*, p65), *Battlefront* is now finally demonstrating how well it can adapt to the rigid restrictions of a licence.

Battlefront was set up for four-vs-four on a PS2 LAN, and its bank of screens drew an adoring crowd. Although on release the game will support up to 64 players on PC, and up to 16 on consoles, even with eight it was easy to get a sense of the heat of battle. Environments are perfect recreations, and the joy of the licence is that you – and all your opponents – are already schooled in the tactics at your disposal.

Particularly gratifying are the vehicles, which encourage players to team up as pilots and gunners. Pandemic shows every sign of delivering on what should be a very easy sell.



As well as the instant-action battles available on the demo, *Battlefront*'s galactic conquest mode will allow players to collaborate on a more strategic offensive against whole systems

Dead Rush

Format: **GC, PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **Treyarch**

Your city is overrun by zombies, mutants and undead beasts of indistinct evolutionary origin, but instead of cowering at home you've got to zip around town in any vehicle you can find, collecting parts and weaponry to recycle. Using vehicles as weapons against the mutants looks hilarious, but they will retaliate by attempting to drag you from your car. And they'll keep fighting after decapitation. *Driver* with zombies, then.



In or out of a vehicle, your mission is to scavenge for car and weapon parts with which to stem the zombie/mutant tide

The Sims 2

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Electronic Arts**
Developer: **Maxis**

The Sims' transformation from Little Computer People simulator to larger-than-life character, well, simulator is almost complete. While the visual finesse of full 3D is the obvious improvement, it's in giving your sims deeper hopes and fears that Maxis has made its real breakthrough.

Listening in on a producer's demo at E3 amplified this. We took up the story of the cheating husband whose full life history had been edited (via in-built tools) into a rolling movie on the EA stand. Blessed (or cursed) with the emotional profile of a barfly, thanks to his sleazy wants and fears, Don required little prompting to tempt an old flame into a discrete living room. But his fumbling was discovered by a sister-in-law, who rushed to tell his wife. The other half's particular aspirations being more family-orientated, she shrugged off his excuses and had a mental breakdown in the garden. Not a subtle psychodrama, but sufficiently convincing to drive a typical Australian soap. Emotional excess is also likely in players; as in the seminal *Creatures* games of yesteryear, you'll now see your sims born and grow up (fast), with family units spanning grandparents to grandchildren. What's more, the crumblies crumble. Scare stories in the tabloids seem assured.

Graphically, *The Sims 2* is shaping up nicely, with the sims' hip-swaying and sashaying a jaunty step on from the stage-fright stances of the original. And almost imperceptibly, the shift to 3D has been achieved without evident loss of clarity – vital for retaining bestselling massmarket status. Less appealing is Maxis' slim and symmetrical view of the human race. While old sims go a dignified grey, going on current demos they're still blessed with model looks and size-10 genes. *The Sims: Fat And Ugly* remains the greatest expansion pack never made.



Despite the increased subtlety of the sims' facial expressions, the game is still heavily – and sensibly – reliant on icons and thought bubbles



Cold War

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Dreamcatcher**
Developer: **Mindware Studios**



Mindware has until Christmas to find a way to distinguish this in the overcrowded 'realistic' stealth market. The pleasing plot, concerning an American hack framed by Russians, provokes another bland round of corridors and stairwells. Stealth is represented by the usual preposterous method of crouch-walking right behind an oddly oblivious enemy, and the much-vaunted 'improvised' weapons seem worryingly scripted.

Rome: Total War

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **Creative Assembly**



Rome is a game that has been revealing itself, inch by inch, for almost two years now. Smaller titles would be running out of things to show, but *Rome* has bulk like no other title. As well as unveiling multiplayer modes, Creative demonstrated in no uncertain terms why its blend of vicious hand-to-hand fighting, vast realtime battles, city building and political intrigue might just be all the games you'll ever need.

Battlefield 2

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **EA**
Developer: **Digital Illusions (DICE)**



Battlefield 2 has new engines behind the scenes running the visuals, audio and physics. This includes dynamic lighting, modelled bullet penetration and EAX 3D sound





Where *Battlefield* leads, other games follow. E3 2004 was overrun with Vietnam and second world war titles, while the show's buzzphrase was 'sandbox' gaming, the idea that you can interact creatively with everything in the environment to achieve objectives in new and novel ways. PC developers have also belatedly woken up to the fact that approachability is crucial to expanding the online community.

Battlefield has already succeeded on these fronts, so inevitably this all-new sequel will make less of a splash. However, DICE is proud that it has managed to drastically overhaul the game's graphics engine – complex, contemporary urban environments are the norm – without compromising interactivity. Brilliantly detailed character models now give you an instant impression of a colleague's abilities, be they a commando, a heavy weapons expert or a medic (and the resuscitation animation is hilarious). Bullet penetration is now tangible on all surfaces and the new tank-to-air missile system looks like great fun, as well as highlighting the detail on distant copters.

Improved teamplay options allow some players to assume the mantle of squad leaders, communicating orders to others via an eight-way command menu, a smart symbol system and the ability to plot waypoints on a satellite map. Teams can define themselves with custom logos that can also be applied to vehicles and can keep track of each other in-game with (optional) directional arrows marking colleagues' positions at all time.

Everything in *Battlefield 2* is designed to provide the minimum of faff. Once your preferences are saved, the game will automatically throw you into a favourite server, or one populated by players of a similar mindset. Stat tracking is comprehensive, but *Battlefield 2* isn't a game for number crunchers.

Warhammer Online

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **Climax Nottingham**

Our beardiest homegrown MMO continues its march toward beta, displaying an ethic of removing genre baggage for a more instinctive play experience. Stats are largely ghosted, and enemies are classed by how dangerous they appear – commendable, but perhaps misplaced, given that the Warhammer market surely expects to be given all the rules, charts and number strings they can handle.



The engine is Climax's own, and the models are rendered in fine detail

Tribes: Vengeance

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **VU Games**
Developer: **Irrational Games**

It looks like the *Tribes* universe is finally going to be done the justice it deserves. With the arrival of Irrational Games, the developer of *System Shock 2*, the death-sport of *Tribes'* multiplayer will now be accompanied by a strong singleplayer campaign. The maps on show demonstrated the hallmark jetpack-based combat to dazzling effect, with new grappling hooks producing a cross between *Quake* and Quidditch.



Members of the team working on the multiplayer game include people drawn from the *Tribes* modding community

F.E.A.R

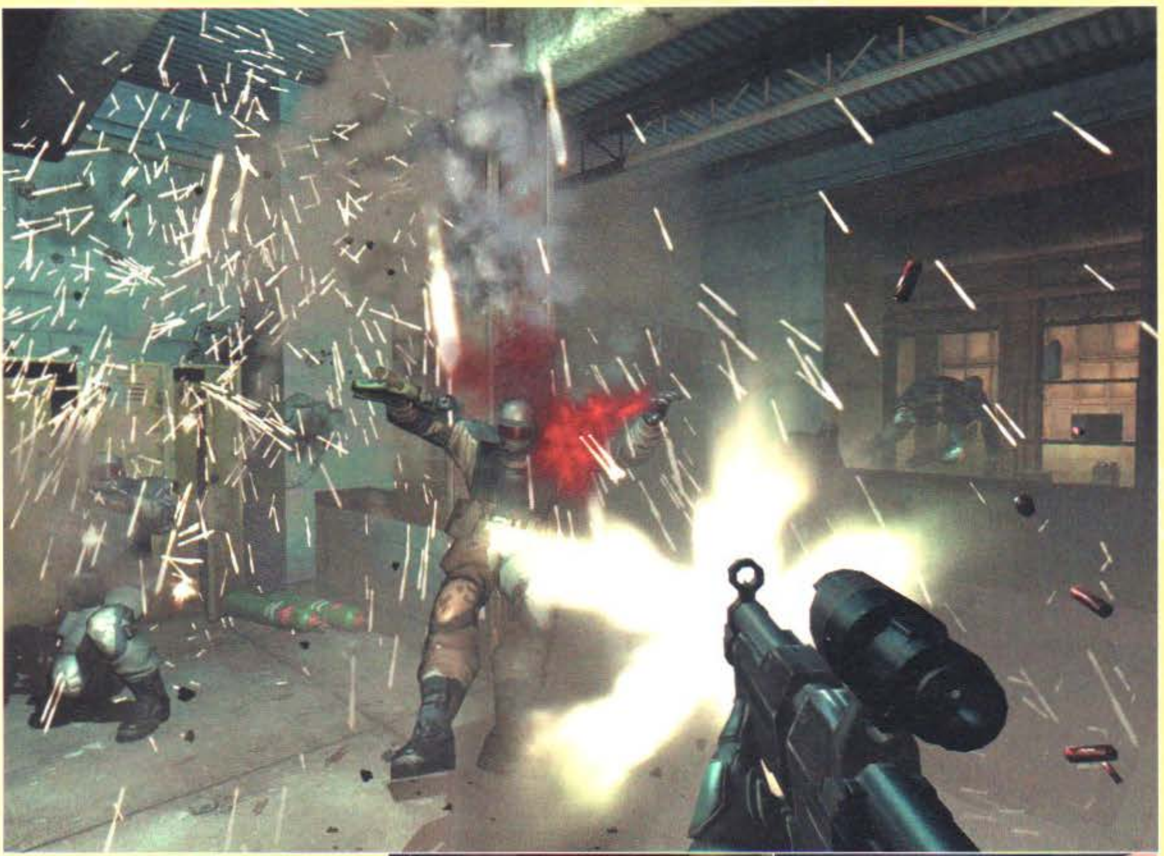
Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Vivendi**
Developer: **Monolith**

Monolith, the Washington state-based developer of *NOLF2* and *Tron 2.0*, is almost breaking new ground with *F.E.A.R* (or *First Encounter Assault Recon*, to give it its unabridged, but less memorable moniker). This dark, mature and extremely violent FPS merges squad-based corridor shootouts with anime schlock horror and acute, paranormal weirdness. Topped with a heavy-handed dose of Hollywood action flick machismo, the result is something loosely resembling S.W.A.T meets The Matrix meets *Silent Hill*.

The *F.E.A.R* in question is a classified government agency that's been trained to deal with supernatural occurrences – in this case, a strange little girl whose powers have decimated an entire special forces squad with particularly gory consequences. The player steps into the role of pointman on the team and enters a largely close-combat, heavily AI-driven FPS – one that's set entirely in one city over a period of 12 hours and includes outdoor as well as indoor sections and (non-controllable) vehicles.

The behind-closed-doors E3 demo was a hard-hitting hi-tech shootout featuring coordinated attacks, flanking manoeuvres, wall-scaling enemies and, most perceptibly, a shiny new graphics engine that renders Lithtech obsolete. The successor employs the usual suite of lighting, shading and per-pixel effects (as well as flavour-of-the-moment shockwaves and Predator-style camouflage effects). It's bolstered by meaty AI and highly destructible Havok 2.0 environments. And, if that wasn't enough, bullet-time-style slow-mo is intelligently used for lightning-fast kicks and punches.

Despite the familiar squad-type scenario, *F.E.A.R* trades heavily on its namesake to create an atmosphere of chilling horror and explorative paranoia. The potential of this marriage rests largely on the dynamic nature of the battles and how skilfully Monolith pulls them off. Cate Archer's exploits suddenly seem like child's play...





Weaponry will range from the usual assault variety and missile launchers to experimental futuristic guns, such as a sub-nuclear blaster

Freedom Force Vs The Third Reich

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Irrational Games**
Developer: **In-house**

The first *Freedom Force* was one of the most charismatic PC games of recent years. Sucking the story 50 years back in time and having the heroes face off against Axis villians like Fortissimo (a corpulent Italian graced with cowardly opera attacks) was never likely to dim its exuberance. An improved engine increases the levels of creative destruction available, and the create-a-hero system has been streamlined.



Heroes now join the fray without being instructed, although the basic tactical RPG rhythm of the game remains intact

Sid Meier's Pirates!

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Atari**
Developer: **Firaxis**

Nostalgic gamers are set to get exactly what they've been asking for. *Pirates!* is billed as the 21st century take on Meier's 1987 classic, and that's how it plays as you sail the high seas, draw cutlasses to board a rival, and then celebrate with a ballroom dance to woo the governor's daughter. *Pirates!* looks polished (the odd land-traversing frigate aside) and the graphics are joyous. Imagine *The Sims 2* putting on Pirates of Penzance.



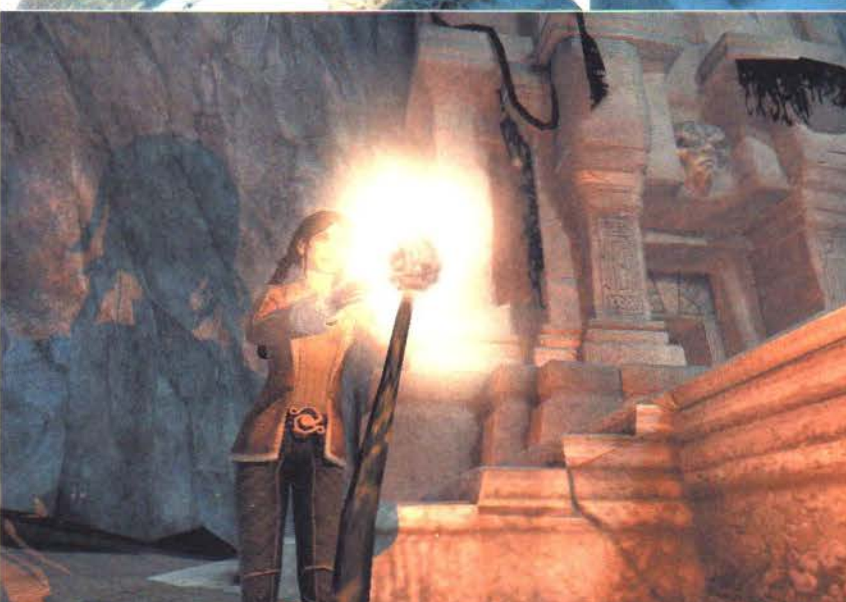
You can choose a nationality and starting date, as well as a special character skill

Dreamfall

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **TBC**
Developer: **Funcom**











None of *TLJ*'s visual appeal has been lost in the transition to full 3D: veterans should be able to recognise the top two scenes from April's early journey

And so the reinvention of the point-and-click adventure game continues. Much like Revolution's recent *Broken Sword*, Norwegian developer Funcom has taken a from-scratch approach to the next game in its *Longest Journey* universe. Not a direct sequel – creative director Ragnar Tornquist prefers the 'spiritual sequel' tag – the story of *Dreamfall* is set ten years after the original game's ending, with the twin worlds of rational Stark and fantastic Arcadia once again threatened. Previous heroine April Ryan, left trapped in Arcadia for the intervening decade, will return as one of three playable characters; a second will be mysterious warrior Kian, and the main plot's focus falls on Zoe, a young dropout from Stark.

The main changes involve the game's control system. Now set in a fully 3D world, Funcom is committed to making the transition as accessible as possible. With this in mind, various controller setups will be available including joypad, mouse and keyboard, and the possibility of a mouse-only option. In terms of screen interaction, movement is still controlled by selecting the location you want your character to approach. An equivalent level of object interaction to the traditional point-and-click interface is provided by a thin vertical plane of light from the playable character, something Tornquist has labelled a 'focus field'. Any item in the world can be highlighted and queried with it.

Interaction will typically be automatic, with actions such as jumping or climbing being triggered by proximity when they are available in the environment. This more physical approach sees less of a reliance on inventory management. In one small example, when blocked by a locked door, instead of resorting to a lengthy key hunt, Zoe simply kicks it down. Nice.

Tabula Rasa

Format: **PC**

Publisher: **NCsoft**

Developer: **NCsoft Austin**

The 'blank slate' of the title is a little misleading with regards to the game's development pedigree. Designed by Ultima creator Richard Garriott with a studio comprised largely of ex-Origin talent (who cut their MMO teeth on *Ultima Online* and the ill-fated *Ultima Worlds Online: Origin*), and funded by Korean online giant NCsoft, it hasn't exactly started from scratch.

But the work ethic has obviously been taken to heart on *Tabula Rasa*'s design, in addition to being influenced by exposure to their publisher's market. A technicolour sci-fi epic with eastern philosophy leanings and a combat system inspired by the oft-namechecked *Soul Calibur*, it's certainly a broadside to genre tradition.

Skills develop over time, rather than being locked at character generation, and the virtual fashionista will also appreciate the game eschewing body armour and emphasising user-definable clothing. The goal is to create a more dynamic, quickly rewarding MMO experience – how well it succeeds will be more apparent when beta testing begins later in the year.





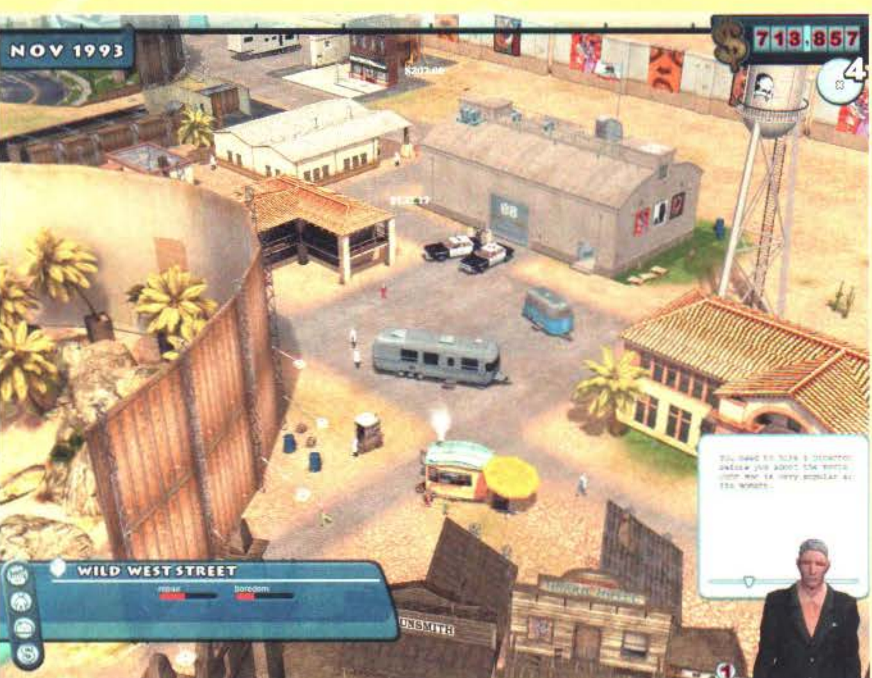
About that 'sci-fi theme': we mean the butterfly-winged horned horses, electric-haloed heroes and Yes album cover landscape kind, although *Tab Ras* also sports some rusted metal dungeons for those easily alarmed by exposure to colour

The Movies

Format: **PC, PS2**

Publisher: **Activision**

Developer: **Lionhead**



As if creating Citizen Kane meets Predator wasn't an exacting enough task, you've got to rescue key personnel from rehab

The Movies' *Sims*-goes-to-Hollywood premise still sounds enticing. Much of the appeal lies in the details, implemented with Lionhead wit: the need to prevent your actors from causing a sex scandal on set; the fact that you begin at the dawn of the silent movie era with primitive kit; and the way you can take advantage of history by tailoring scripts to popular opinion.

The difficulty in previewing a **Peter Molyneux** game without recourse to playable code is that he refuses to countenance the impossible. PC and PS2 exchanging content? "We're definitely looking into it," he grins. It's therefore difficult to get a sense of how much genuine freedom *The Movies* will actually offer when crafting cinematic epics. Genres appear to consist of stock costumes and scenarios, which can be cross-pollinated for amusement value, but otherwise could prove limiting if you were expecting a movie version of *MTV Music Generator*.

Instead, think of *The Movies* as *Theme Park* for aspiring Weinsteins, and you shouldn't be disappointed.

Splinter Cell 3

Format: **PC, Xbox, PS2** | Publisher: **Ubisoft** | Developer: **Ubisoft Montreal**

It's a sign of the current-gen consoles' age that Sam Fisher's third appearance as the covert neck-snapping agent is scheduled initially for PC. Seeing the game in action, it's obvious why: the series takes a major step forward in terms of visuals with new environment detail and fancy effects.

Posh focaccia, then, but it's largely the same cheese-and-tomato filling in the *Splinter Cell* sandwich. You'll still be spending your time lurking in shadows, avoiding guards and cursing your ineptitude when you raise the alarm. A tangy relish is added in the form of a truly cooperative twoplayer mode, in which new moves become available – helping each other up walls, dangling your pal through hatchways and so on. If these scenarios live up to their promise, this friendly multiplayer mode could be a major hit.

It's a title promising many moments of exhilaration – more satisfying modes of dispatching enemies, more ways to manipulate the environment to your advantage – but the relentlessly one-track pace may yet grate.





As these screenshots demonstrate, *Splinter Cell 3*'s appearance at E3 was a last-minute decision; there was little for Ubisoft to reveal, apart from the fact that, well, Sam Fisher's in it

Dragon Age

Format: **PC** | Publisher: **TBC** | Developer: **BioWare**





***Dragon Age* promises the option to select not just your character type, but your character's back story and motivation, encouraging multiple story arcs from the quest's very beginning**

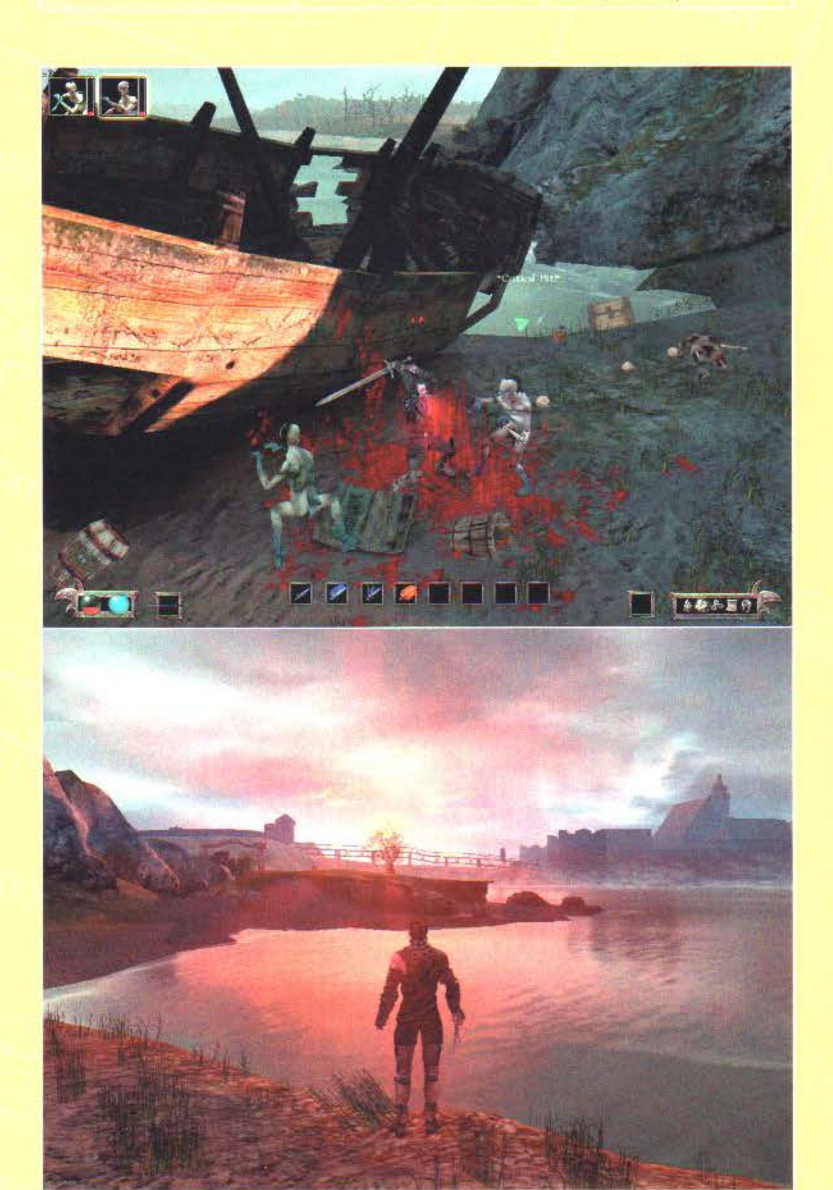
Recent years have been kind to BioWare. It won plaudits for *KOTOR* and the multiplayer nuance of *Neverwinter Nights*, and further success looks assured with both *Jade Empire* and *KOTOR 2*. The *Baldur's Gate* series is where the developer first cut its teeth, and *Dragon Age* – shown off to a limited number of journalists – is as much the spiritual successor to this older series as it is to more recent output.

Taking stock of *Baldur's Gate*'s revered writing and gameplay, BioWare is fusing it with the multiplayer features of *NWN* and the tactical combat of *KOTOR* (although *BG*'s more strategic overhead mode will be employed, too). *Dragon Age* doesn't milk D&D conventions – just derivative races, classes, et al with a flavour of their own immersed in a world that weaves conspiracy and warfare into the campaigns.

Given *NWN*'s technical shortcomings, a brand-new engine is especially welcome, boasting impressive terrain handling and flexibility for the gameplay. *The* PC RPG to watch in 2005? Certainly, if BioWare can keep up its inexorable pace.

The Witcher

Format: PC | Publisher: TBC | Developer: CDProjekt



The Witcher oscillates betweens scenes of reflective, story-building atmosphere and frenzied battle scenes, in which your choice of predetermined fighting manoeuvres becomes crucial

With Poland now a member of the EU, the headline-grabbing nature of eastern European game development should be a thing of the past. Still, the conversion of erstwhile game publisher CDProjekt into a high-class RPG studio remains newsworthy, not least thanks to its licensing of BioWare's Aurora engine.

Based on the morally ambitious fiction of Polish writer Andrzej Sapkowski, *The Witcher* contains a number of innovative features. Most obvious is the combo-based battle system: players can select up to eight moves, which when correctly triggered create powerful attacks. The other is a lack of moral certainty, something characterised by the role of the Witcher Brotherhood itself. Akin to mercenaries, they are typically paid to rid villages of monsters, but you can also act out of a spirit of community to gain information. Equally, it is possible to kill almost all the NPCs in the game, although over time this will clearly make them less likely to help you should you require it. In keeping with such flexibility, three different endings are promised.

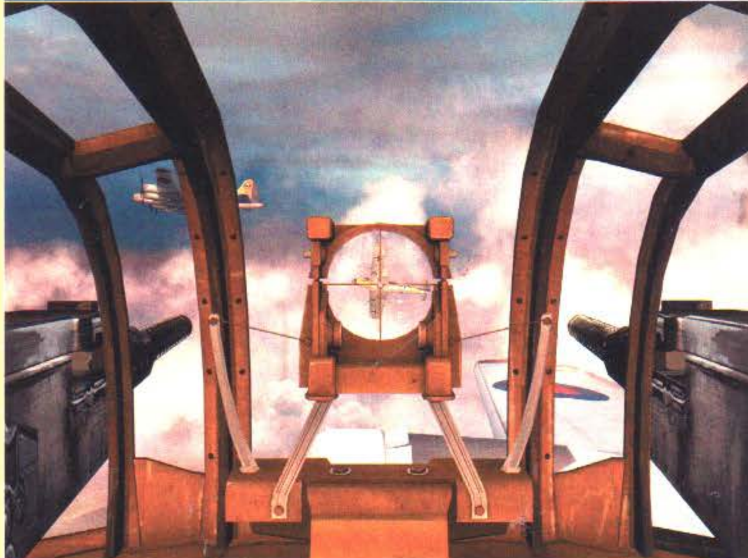
Call Of Duty: United Offensive

Format: PC | Publisher: Activision | Developer: Grey Matter Studios

Knowing it's on to a good thing with this impressive competitor to EA's *Medal Of Honor* series, Activision surprised no one with the announcement of an expansion for its gripping WWII-themed shooter. As with the initial *Call Of Duty*, *United Offensive* features three campaigns, each depicting a few hours in the lives of a soldier from Britain, the US and Russia.

As ever, the game will rely on artfully constructed set pieces. As a hapless Russian conscript, you'll be taking part in the biggest armoured battle ever fought – Kursk. Fleeing from transports being dive-bombed by Stukas, perhaps the most frightening experiences yet await, as the Germans close in with flamethrowers. The unusual British missions begin with you manning the gun turrets of a bomber on a revenge raid over occupied territory, having to keep fighters at bay. The tension is kept up as you switch turrets, but disaster strikes as the whole rear section of the bomber falls away, leaving you to fall to earth – but live to fight another day. More of a good thing? We can't say no.





The dramatic level that takes place aboard a B17 bomber sees you desperately switching between gun emplacements as your comrades are gradually picked off by incoming fighters

World Of Warcraft

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Vivendi**
Developer: **Blizzard**







Blizzard's decision to give *WOW* a rich, hand-drawn look has drawn distaste from some quarters over its technical simplicity, but it's instantly recognisable (and enticing) in the crowded MMO market

No doubt aware of the inaccessibility of most online RPGs, Blizzard has artfully constructed a persistent universe as friendly and as easy to assimilate as one of the slick strategy titles for which it became famous. Equally, never a developer to be rushed, it's taken its time to let the currently ongoing US beta (and forthcoming European beta) to test every aspect.

The mechanics differ little from the genre norm. You create a character – dwarves, trolls, orcs, gnomes and more – and pick a typical fantasy class. Tasks, quests and crafting are all fairly predictable, but *WOW*s presentation is what sets it apart. An interface free of clutter and confusion makes it a welcoming experience, allowing you to learn the ropes as you progress, rather than throwing it all at you in the opening minutes.

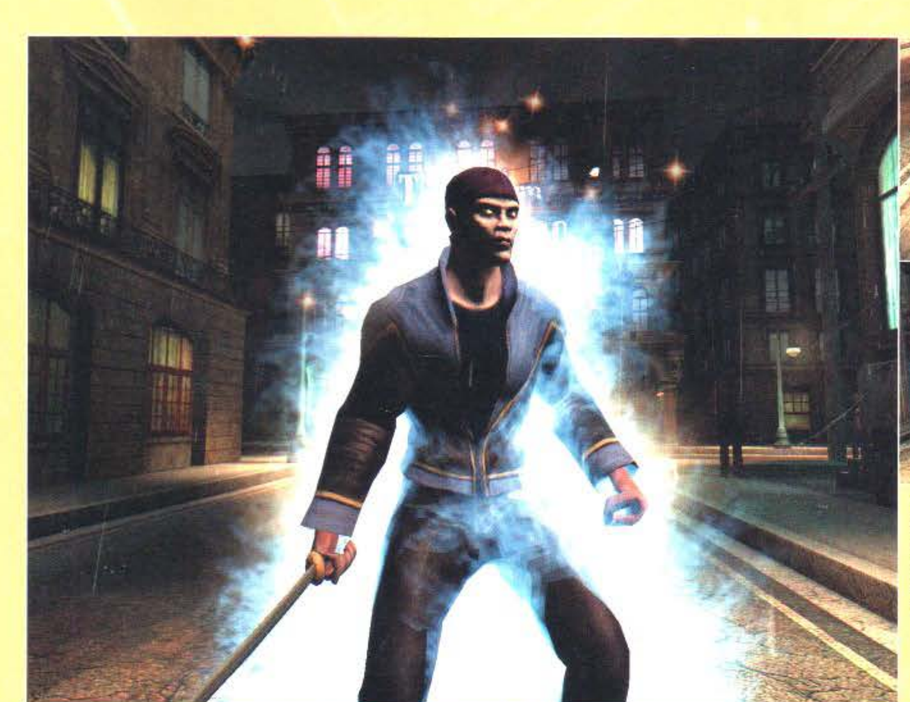
Grouping with other players is positively encouraged by more challenging quests, while race-specific towns and strong overall visual design mean *WOW* is also offering an unusually atmospheric experience. Suffice it to say, it's given the creators of competing titles plenty to think about.

Vampire The Masquerade: Bloodlines

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Activision**
Developer: **Troika**

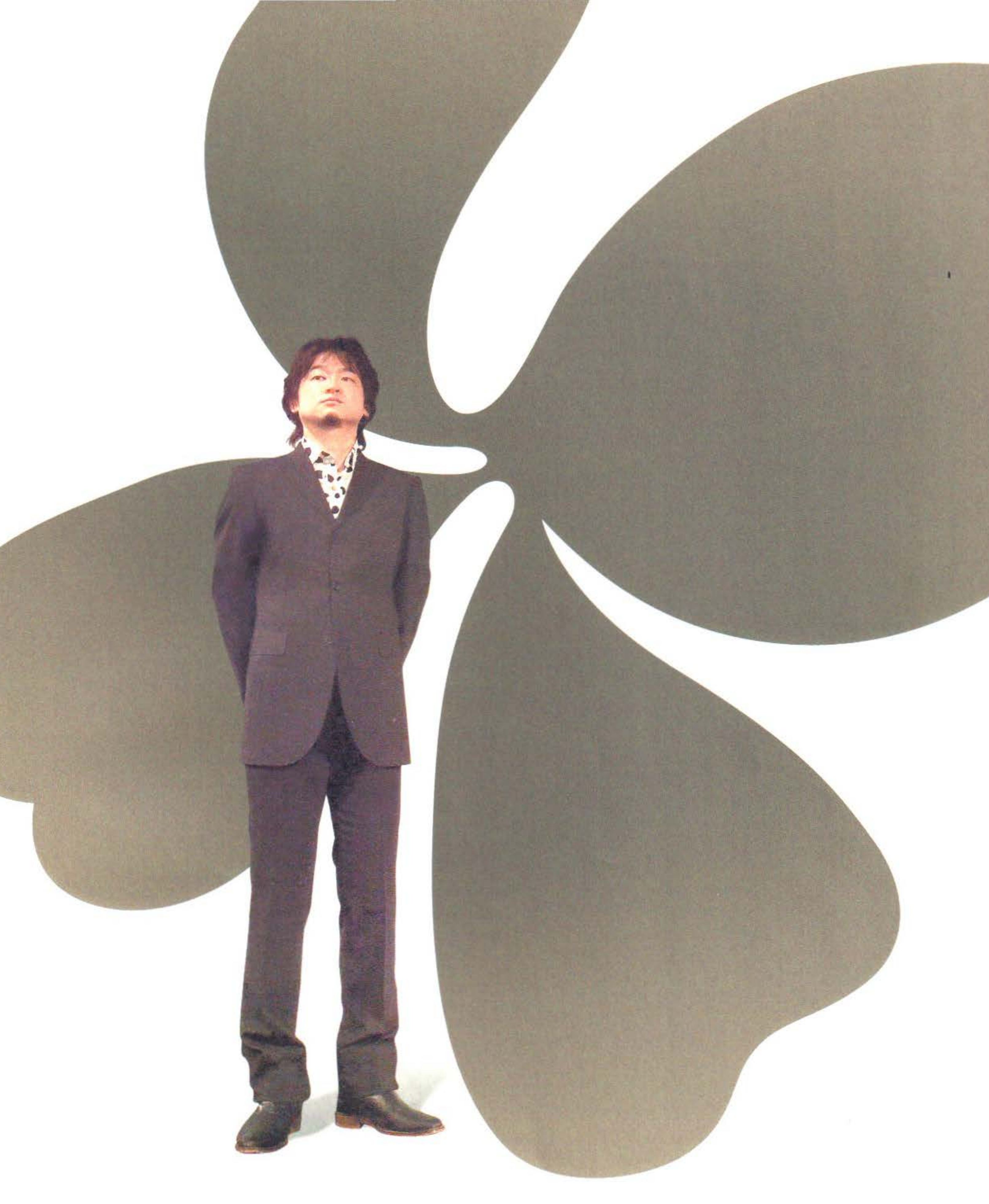
One of few singleplayer PC RPGs on show at E3, *Vampire* aims to blend elements of the traditional – being based on a pen-and-paper system – with vivid design and impressive technology. Being firstperson, and the first game to have licensed *Half-Life 2*'s Source engine, has certainly garnered a few extra column inches, but RPG specialist Troika certainly hasn't wasted it, with naturalistic animation and lip-synching particularly noticeable.

The *Bloodlines* subtitle refers to the various types of vampire you can choose to play as at the outset. Each is distinct and has certain strengths, so in good old-fashioned RPG fashion you're able to act as you like, whether that's ripping everyone's head off or charming their pants off. Gradually learned and improved abilities facilitate progress, and there seems to be a good balance of dialogue exposition, puzzle solving and combat, with multiple paths to progression. Though guns are available along with most other weapons you can imagine, we hope to use our natural charm to carry the day.





Troika's artists have certainly taken the jump from isometric fantasy to firstperson gutter goth in their stride; we hope the appeal of the *Vampire* universe hasn't gone out with teased hair



Creative Lovers

Capcom's Clover Studios is riding high on the success of Viewtiful Joe, but it has more to offer than just cel shading...

While Capcom's establishment of Clover Studios, an independent company headed by Atsushi Inaba, had been announced in March, an official press conference was not to follow until April. This Shibuya event opened with a surprisingly frank, if downbeat, address from Capcom CEO Kenzo Tsujimoto, who chose not to skirt the issue of Capcom's recent financial difficulties. With the Japanese games market in decline, and in his opinion no sign of a recovery in sight, he feels the firm must make preparations to survive the current climate and encourage future growth. As many of Capcom's popular licences reach the end of their cycles, a new breed of games is necessary – the cue for Inaba to introduce Clover Studio.

He did so with an aptly idiosyncratic presentation: a semi-transparent curtain was lowered to serve as a projection screen, with Inaba standing behind it. The resulting effect was of the producer being inside the projected elements, as a statement of Clover's intent to deliver original content. Though the presentation provided a primer in Clover's game design policy – refocusing games on gamers, recapturing the essence of gaming – it was the final screen that was to get the audience's full attention. Among a



ist of Clover staffers were Shinji Mikami and Hideki Kamiya, confirmation that Production Studio #4's most recognised names have moved to the new studio.

The introduction over, Inaba discussed the PS2 port of *Viewtiful Joe* and its sequel, which he stressed will be the only Production Studio #4 licence continued at Clover. While *Viewtiful Joe 2* may have been the event's biggest title from a media perspective, and indeed Inaba's intention is to use the name to bring public attention to the studio, new title *Okami* was the most important announcement with regards to Clover's future direction.

VJ director Kamiya's impressive vision draws on traditional Japanese art: with the tagline 'A legend is in motion', the action takes place on an unfurling scroll. The game screen is textured like coarse paper and the initially lifeless environments are painted in harsh black ink, representing the stark aftermath of an Earth overrun by evil. The player controls a divine wolf, Amaterasu, an incarnation of the sun god charged with restoring life (and colour) to the world. Evil forces must be battled through the stage to a boss, whose defeat releases the land's life force and repopulates the now vivid landscape. As a divine being, Amaterasu draws his strength from the support of the Earth's inhabitants, and completing their quests provides additional powers for the next stage. There's no denying *Okami*'s artistic merit, but its extreme stylisation could make it hard to sell – though Inaba and Kamiya are bullish given *VJ*'s unexpected success.

With no *Onimusha*-clout title or celebrity endorsement beyond a typically boisterous, but fleeting, appearance by Mikami, media attention was subdued in comparison to Capcom's usual announcements. Regardless of the turnout, Capcom's apparent recognition of a need to soften its reliance on expensive full-scale projects is important in itself. By varying its output between boutique titles and the aforementioned epics, the company is safeguarding both its own interests and those of the Japanese industry – a longterm ambition that's more laudable than a glib publicity stunt. We sat down with Inaba to find out more (see opposite).

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By varying its output, the company is safeguarding both its own interests and those of the Japanese industry

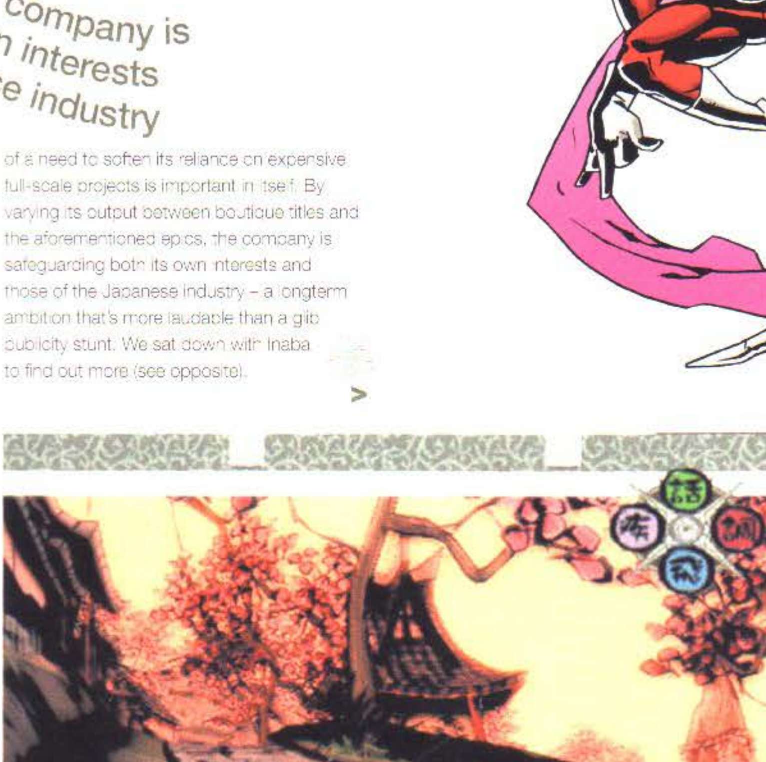


Victory in boss battles leads to the world filling with colour and the return of its animal life





Each of Amaterasu's actions can be allocated to a face button, indicated by the symbol in the top right-hand corner



Intentionally, *Okami*'s restored landscapes – all peach sunsets and cherry blossom – look good enough to hang on your wall. And, as with *Viewtiful Joe*, the game is even more captivating when it's moving



Q&A: ATSUSHI INABA

PRODUCER AND HEAD OF CLOVER STUDIO



Why did you choose Clover Studio as the name of the new company?

Clover is the combination of two ideas: creative and lover. This has been designed in a very similar way to *Viewtiful Joe*: view and beautiful. The number four was also very important, as it reminds people inside the studio about their common origins: Production Studio #4. The four leaves of the clover are also an image of happiness or healing. The idea is that creators are able to create games as they want and not under pressure from the market. This healing process benefits players who will be able to enjoy true gaming experiences.

Is Production Studio #4 still active, or has the entire staff moved to Clover?

In fact, we split the department in two. There were about 120 people at Production Studio #4. We made a 50/50 split, 60 each.

There were a few people who wanted to follow us immediately. Then we asked each staff member if he or she wanted to try the Clover Studio adventure or not. It was just a simple and direct question.

In many ways, this seems similar to Sega's restructuring a few years ago – forming 'independent' studios based on the in-house departments to shift the financial risk. Is this the same process?

No, it is very different in reality. In Sega's case, they transformed entire departments into companies. It was just the legal nature of the departments that changed; there was nothing different in terms of creativity.

With Clover Studio, the decision was made in terms of creativity. We decided to make something different from what you could expect from Capcom. Of course, you could argue that Capcom has difficulties. It is true but I would like people to understand that our decision is motivated by our creative approach. I mean something very positive.

Previously, you had many successes inside Capcom, and had the freedom to develop a high-risk project like *Tekki*. Why create an independent company?

Yes, it is true that the company let me do many things. But I think that Capcom has become a huge brand. With this size and fame, it is not easy to move in terms of creation. At Production Studio #4 we had very special ideas that were not always in phase with what users would expect from a name like Capcom. Sometimes this played in favour of Capcom, but sometimes it was working against the company's image. So, with Clover Studio, we wanted to divide Capcom's brand. Users will not see our game as a traditional Capcom game, but as a 'Clover game' inside Capcom. When our games are too original, they will not hurt Capcom's traditional image and users will think: 'Ah, yes, that is a Clover Studio game'.

We want to bring original content to the game community. If we stayed inside Capcom we could not explore the creative ways we wanted to. This is the very base of our motivation in founding Clover Studio.

> "The idea is that creators are able to create games as they want and not under pressure from the market. This process benefits players"

How would you describe the fundamental differences between Capcom and Clover Studio, as developers?

First, I would say that we are working in a very difficult environment. When we were inside Capcom, we could take three years or more to develop a game. We were not that preoccupied by the financial aspects of our project – we could be in deficit, but we knew that the other departments would fill the hole for us, but this is not something we wanted to do. If we were only motivated by originality in the creation of Clover Studio, this would be seen only as a sign of our ego, our selfishness. We want to create, but at the same time be entirely responsible for our own actions.

Of course, inside Capcom, there are many people who want to make very great things.







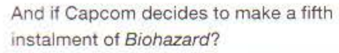




but their approach is different because of the gap in resources and size. So more than this difference in resources, I would say that our fundamental difference is the way we think.

What difficulties do you foresee developing within Clover Studio, compared to within Capcom?
Well, I think that the 'risk factor' is going to become a big factor in our work. For instance, it is going to be impossible to make games like *Tekki*! That is for sure. But that does not mean we will be controlled by this risk. We have to think differently and this is one of our objectives right now.

"Our main objective is to prove our potential. So we have to define what can or cannot be done with the resources we have right now"



We will not be able to enjoy the same comfort now to develop our games. In this difficult environment, we will develop our strength. Our main objective is to prove our potential. So we have to define what can or cannot be done with the resources we have right now. I don't know how many years it will take, but I hope the time will come when our potential will be recognised, giving us more weight with Capcom. But for that, we need to make a succession of successful games. By then we would have been able to increase our staff and aim at bigger projects.

Developers such as Mikami and Kamiya are associated with very popular, successful licences. Will Clover Studio continue these?
Well, absolutely no. We don't want to do anything with these licences. If we did, we could not possibly do other projects than these licences. I mean, there are about 60 people at Clover Studio, so you would need to use the entire staff and more to develop a new *Biohazard*. With a project like *Viewtiful Joe*, it becomes viable. We can have a certain balance in our working process inside the company. Now that does not mean I don't want to develop on some of our past licences, but our main desire is to deliver original content, new experiences.

How does this affect *Biohazard 4*?
Well, this is a special case. Shinji Mikami is the director of the game and he will finish it in cooperation with Production Studio #4. We are actually sending some of our staff to work on the game with Mikami at Production Studio #4.

And if Capcom decides to make a fifth instalment of *Biohazard*?
This would not be our problem any more. I think Production Studio #4 would be in charge of that.

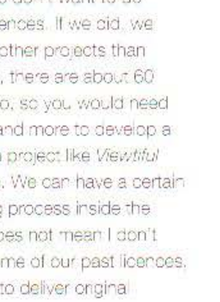
What position and priority will Kamiya and Mikami take at Clover?
They are 'simply' directors. They only wish to create games, nothing more. Of course, they add their personal aura to the games they develop and to our company. They will become the company's face in many aspects. I mean, I'm not creating *Okami*, it is Kamiya's creation. But inside the company, they are 'just' directors.

As studio head, will you still be involved with creative work?
I will continue to produce games. That's for sure. I will be in charge of many aspects of the company simultaneously: president, finances, producer… but I will keep that way until I feel the company is stable. Plus, don't forget that there aren't that many of us at Clover. I think I will face quite a lot of stress! But I've accepted this. I think this leaves the others at Clover more comfort to do their job.

Will you be running Clover differently than you would have run an internal Capcom studio?
Not much. I give a lot of freedom to the people working with me. As long as I get the expected result, it does not matter how the people get to it. It has been the case even when we were at Production Studio #4.

Have you felt the need to respond to criticisms of the original *Viewtiful Joe* in developing the sequel?
With the first *Viewtiful Joe*, we started to work on the design and adapted play mechanisms around it. So, sometimes the priority given to the design 'jammed' the game experience. For example, the character had short hands and legs. That made fighting difficult because his punches or kicks would not easily hit adversaries. But this was a choice we made from the start. With *Viewtiful Joe 2*, we do not intend to correct this. To us, *Viewtiful Joe* is an accomplishment of one style we wanted to develop at that time. With the sequel, we want to introduce another experience.

Have you been surprised by the game's positive reception in the west?
Oh, yes! We were so surprised! The game has even appeared and been awarded in USA Today. It got many awards, including an **Edge**



'Let's rock, baby!' meets 'Henshin a-go-go!' – two great catchphrases, rightly together at last





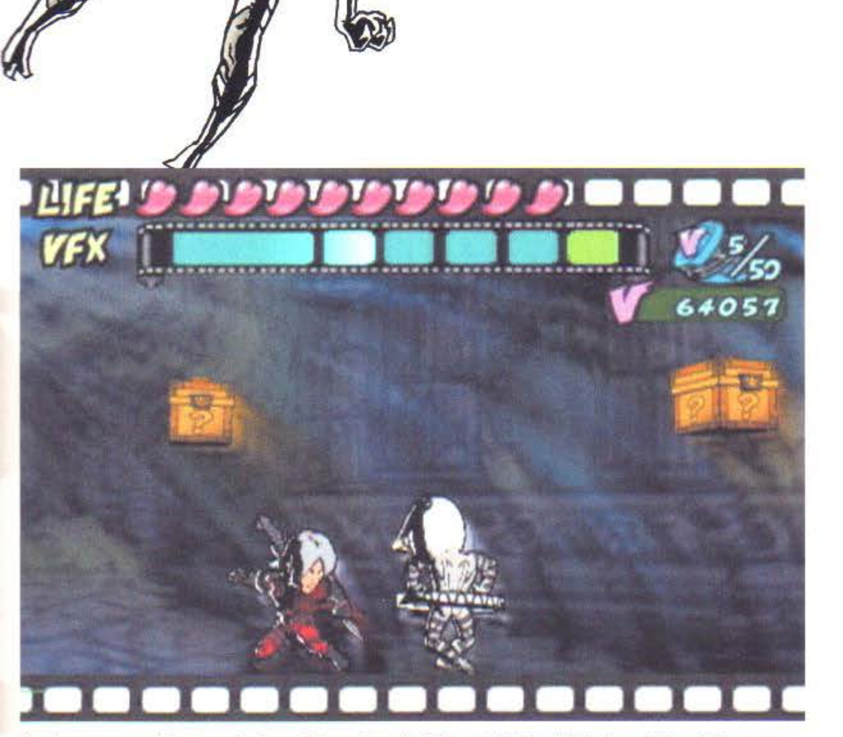




The Earth's life force returns in a storm of brush strokes – even at this early stage it's obvious *Okami* isn't pulling any punches with its visual signifiers



Though arguably less attention-grabbing than that of Joe and co, *Okami*'s promotional artwork still leaps from the page and has the same sort of charm and sensibility as its sister Clover Studio title



Kamiya suggested the introduction of Dante into the PS2 port. "I thought that would break the game balance since Dante was really strong," recalls Inaba, "but he insisted, and the result was very fun"

Award! Thank you very much! When we went to E3, we saw that it was well accepted by gamers but we never thought it would be praised so much!

Is *Viewtiful Joe 2*'s multiplatform development a concession to the American market?

The market is as it is. I mean, PS2 is the main platform and releasing the game only on GC would be difficult in terms of business, especially in the US. We can't control hardware success. We can only choose the target of the game. Plus, we really want as many players as possible to enjoy our games to come. But that does not mean we will only develop for the largest platform on the market. Nintendo has been able to develop its console this far with games as its only strength. That cannot be dismissed.

***Okami* has a strong Japanese theme. Is it intended chiefly for the Japanese market, or do you see it being a success overseas as well?**

Basically, we want to make games for all the markets around the world. I think we've integrated a lot of Japanese soul into this game, but I don't see it as a barrier. I believe it will be understood overseas as well. It is obvious when you see how Miyazaki's Sen To Chihiro (Spirited Away) has been successful outside Japan and especially in the western world. I don't think we can speak of cultural barriers now as we used to do in the past. I don't feel the oriental touch as a wall to the success in the west, not any more.

If the experience is great, it should be successful.

***Okami*, like *Viewtiful Joe*, uses a cel-shaded visual style: will this be a characteristic of Clover Studio games?**

Not at all. If you consider *Biohazard 4*, it has reached such a level of visual realism that we thought we could not make anything fun from this. We needed something very different. With *Viewtiful Joe*, we tested this approach. Using cel shading we managed to deliver an interesting game experience.

With *Okami*, we tested another form of cel shading, not because it has been successfully used in *Viewtiful Joe*, but to answer the project's needs. In *Okami*'s case we wanted to offer a very special visual touch using Japanese traditional art. But cel shading is not our trademark.

***Okami* seems highly original but equally high risk. How do you intend to manage the balance between originality and commercial success?**

I think it is the same problem faced by *Viewtiful Joe*. We proved it can be done, and successfully. The risk has to be controlled by us. Having said that, I know that some of our games in the future may sell only 1,000 copies. If we develop several games like *Tekki*, it would be very difficult for the company to survive. That demonstrates the difficulty of establishing this balance between originality and business. This is what we wanted to learn. This is where we want to get stronger, as I explained before.

Being original is not enough. The game is original and may not be understood in its first version. So we need to think how to correct or develop that – in a sequel, for instance. We need to have the game enjoyed by as many users as possible, and this will result in better sales.

Do you have any plans for Clover beyond *Okami* at this stage?

Well, it is the time when we are speaking a lot about what to do next, which way to go, etc... Of course, we can't say anything for the moment. What I can say is we are very interested by new hardware to come. I mean, this is no surprise.

But we really would like to try these new machines, even once, to experience it, to learn, to test things. I'm talking about both home and portable consoles. We don't necessarily exclude one console. We are interested by all of them.

Many believe the next generation of consoles will require hundreds of developers to produce a single title. How do you plan to develop for these new consoles with a 60-person studio?

Of course there are things you can't do, but there are also things you can. We don't feel the desire to make games that need a large staff. With such games, costs are increasing as well as their scale. I don't think that the gaming experience gets anything from that. I really believe it is time to shift inside our head. We can make great games with a smaller staff. *Okami* does not require a huge staff, not at all. But I know that we will need to increase our staff with time. If needed, outsourcing will be an option for us.

TEKKI'S TRANSMISSION TROUBLES

Inaba explains Capcom's online problems with *Line Of Contact*:

"You know, we used many specifications to their limit with *Tekki*. Among them, there is online connection speed. The game is very demanding. When you consider a five-vs-five online configuration, this represents an incredible level of performance for online infrastructure. In practice, a clear difference appeared between people who can enjoy that and those who can't. Japan has a very good infrastructure and many users are playing without any problems. Now, I realise that we are speaking of high-speed cable connections, but in the US, the infrastructure is not that advanced. I was surprised to see that 56K connections are still the main way to get online there. I guess it is because of the PC, but there is this sense that if you can get online, then you can play online. Of course there are games you can play that way, but games like *Tekki* are out of reach. We received many complaints and I'm aware that it was a failure on our behalf. Enjoying the standalone play is easy, but to get online you need to meet high specifications. It is like a F1 car. You can enjoy it on a circuit but it is very difficult to race on a highway if it is not clear of any traffic. We learned a lot with *Tekki*. You can't imagine! When I see the other departments inside Capcom delivering online games like *Outbreak* or *Monster Hunter*, I'm surprised how they have been able to do it. It is quite an achievement, believe me!"





It's still unclear how much of a 'new experience' *VJ2* will be in practice, but Silvia's cheerleader-fu certainly can't be accused of lazily aping action movies. Or cheerleading tradition, for that matter





through the looking glass

The most innovative PC game developer of the '90s wasn't id Software, wasn't Westwood Studios, and isn't even around any more. We look at the enduring impact of Looking Glass Studios...





Unlike movies or music, videogaming hardly values its history. In history's place it has 'retro' – approximately 'anything more than ten years old' – plus Atari if you're American, or for Brits the Spectrum.

Videogaming is so busy looking to tomorrow (with one eye on today's charts) that it only looks back to namecheck the 'golden days' – that mythically perfect early-'80s period mixed up with puberty and first cars. But lumping the past into a colour-clash daydream is flawed. The history of videogames – while hardly a tale of sex and excess – has value. Without an awareness of where games came from, it's hard to see what's happening now.

Relentless topicality misses the point when the point's not clear for a decade. Who guessed at the mod scene that would germinate from *Doom*'s .wad files? Who played the original 2D *Grand Theft Auto*, spurned as old-fashioned, and imagined the impact of its sequels on half-a-dozen genres? And who thought in the '90s that a low-profile PC developer on the unfashionable US east coast would one day seem the prototype for 21st-century game development?

Unfortunately, Looking Glass Studios didn't get far into this century; it closed in May 2000. But in a little over a decade it invented the firstperson 3D genre (*Ultima Underworld: The Stygian Abyss*) and the 3D stealth genre (*Thief*), and made a stab at the first squad-based tactical shooter (*Terra Nova*). And that's just the big stuff. Looking Glass was all about the detail. So what made the studio so special?

Burning down the house

If Looking Glass Studios was a rock band, it'd be Talking Heads – intellectual punks in respectable clothing, mixing up genres without forgoing fun. Or maybe The Velvet Underground – perfecting ideas others weren't even looking for. Working on the

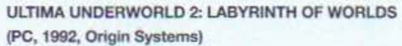
RAISING A GLASS

Turning out firsts like other studios turn out this season's football kit, Looking Glass' best games evolved the game artform…



ULTIMA UNDERWORLD: THE STYGIAN ABYSS
(PC, 1991, Origin Systems)

The game that preceded the FPS genre, even *Wolfenstein 3D*'s creator John Carmack is said to have been inspired by an early demo. Certainly, as the first fully 3D RPG with novelties like bridges and levitation spells, the smooth-scrolling multi-hued *Ultima Underworld* fully realised Neurath's ambition of combining classic roleplaying with cutting-edge technology.



ULTIMA UNDERWORLD 2: LABYRINTH OF WORLDS
(PC, 1992, Origin Systems)

Looking Glass might have been innovation-driven but it wasn't dumb, and it quickly provided a sequel to the original bestseller. Technologically a refinement, the plot is better integrated into the wider *Ultima* storyline than the first.





SYSTEM SHOCK
(PC, 1994, Electronic Arts)

A groundbreaking firstperson action/adventure set on a depopulated space station, *System Shock* was a vast gamespace of levels, weapons, equipment, problems and even a cyberspace alternate reality to explore. Oh, and zombies. Survival horror meets *Ultima Underworld* via William Gibson, *Deus Ex* fans bow down at that game's spiritual forefather.

FLIGHT UNLIMITED
(PC, 1995, Looking Glass)

One of those rare games that made you drop your coffee when you first saw it, real satellite image data was the bedrock of *Flight Unlimited*'s detailed terrain. It immediately made Microsoft's venerable *Flight Simulator* series look just that. The physics model is so realistic that real-life flaws in the planes' handling emerged quite naturally.





TERRA NOVA: STRIKE FORCE CENTAURI
(PC, 1996, Looking Glass)

In *Terra Nova* you choose the right squad members, get them equipped, and then speed forth in sci-fi fashion across three planets (with varying gravity), issuing orders and hearing the anguished concern of your squad mates when it all turns sour – years before *Rainbow Six* or *Spec Ops*. The engine handled wide-open spaces but was graphically fuzzy (and used sprites); *Terra Nova* was critically adored but was ignored by the *Quake*-playing masses.

BRITISH OPEN CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF
(PC, 1997, Eidos)

An innovative golf game – we kid you not. Like many Looking Glass titles, a reduced scope (there are just two courses here) enabled the designers to up the detail and atmosphere. Needless to say, the golf ball is physically modelled.





THIEF: THE DARK PROJECT
(PC, 1998, Eidos)

Looking Glass' last great experimental breakthrough, *Thief* gets you thinking as you apply stealth over firepower – a challenge that equally vexed its creators. Making a game where you avoided combat at the height of firstperson shooter fever might seem perverse, but this original firstperson sneaker was celebrated, and its quiet footsteps echo today in countless games.

SYSTEM SHOCK 2
(PC, 1999, Electronic Arts)

Largely developed by Looking Glass veterans at Irrational Games, *System Shock 2* was even more frighteningly atmospheric than the original, and, thanks to the use of the *Thief* engine, audio now played a bigger role. Perhaps too austere for the post-*Half-Life* world, sales unfortunately failed to match the critical plaudits.







THIEF II: THE METAL AGE
(PC,2000, Eidos)

The last game completed by Looking Glass, *Thief II* pushed the sneaking template to its limits, ditching the original's fantasy trappings for the closest thing we're ever likely to see to a medieval crime simulator. The finely painted world, complete with greed, avarice and suffering, was perhaps its greatest achievement, although some gamers complained that they spent too much time observing it from the shadows while waiting for a guard to budge.



then-unfashionable PC platform, and being based chiefly in New Hampshire and then Cambridge near Boston – far from the US industry's west coast hangouts – was certainly critical to the studio's eventual make-up. For one thing, it encouraged a better standard of job applicant.

Paul Neurath – a veteran of Richard Garriott's Origin Systems – founded his studio in 1990, naming it Blue Sky Productions. Neurath was already blending genres in his final Origin game, *Space Rogue*, and he wanted to do something similar to RPGs.

Experienced game artist Doug Wike soon joined, together with a couple of programmers and then, crucially, Neurath hired young MIT graduates Dan Schmidt and **Doug Church**. The latter helped Blue Sky gain its greatest asset – smart young people. While Church is at pains to point out that Blue Sky wasn't an MIT clique, the fact course and proved decisive; **Warren Spector** went on to work with the studio for several years, and is today synonymous with Looking Glass, despite only joining its payroll full-time for a little over a year in 1996. As an external producer, Spector says he was "rabidly enthusiastic."

"Working with Looking Glass was one of the best experiences of my life," he says. "Right from the start there was a sense that it was going to change the world. You could feel it. Everyone felt it.

"Paul Neurath was a real visionary and, equally important, he knew enough to hire incredibly smart people. Some of the testers on *Underworld* were MIT PhD candidates! How crazy is that? Blue Sky was made up of a bunch of kids, really, all new to the games business, too young to know what they couldn't do."

It's hardly usual for a development studio, even today, but many of these bright

"They were extremely passionate and debated topics like 'simulation vs emulation' as if the honour of the Klingon race depended on it"

is that many early recruits did hail from Boston's Harvard-of-hi-tech.

The original Blue Sky team was small, and early testers were drawn from Church's MIT housemates, fellow band members and even his Frisbee team. Most were later hired on graduation.

"Paul set an early tone that was about just finding ways to make interesting games, and not worrying much about genres or existing products or where it 'fit'," says Church. "At first, few people had real industry experience. People remembered games they'd played before college, knew a lot about current technology, and tried to figure out what sort of game experiences might be possible."

Thanks to work by a PC programmer named Chris Green, Neurath's nascent RPG soon boasted an industry first – texture mapping. Impressed, Origin offered Neurath the *Ultima* franchise and another die was cast. At first, the omens weren't good – Origin went through two *Ultima Underworld* producers in a little over a year, and Blue Sky began worrying. But the third producer, specially requested by Neurath, stayed the young things were generalists – programmer/designers, musician/programmers and so on. Typical was **Seamus Blackley**, who would later find fame as the prime mover behind the Xbox. Blackley (who remembers his interview for comprising tough technical questions followed by a Frisbee session) says the company's talent pool meant that: "The peer pressure to excel was immense, but it was also comforting because we were literally inventing 3D gameplay as we went – along with a lot of other things – and you needed an astounding crew to make it happen."

From the start it was a multi-team studio, with staff chopping and changing between projects. Between the hiring emphasis, the Origin contacts and a merger with Neurath's old comrade Ned Lerner's company – which precipitated the name change to Looking Glass – impressive talent came into the studio's orbit. To pick one example, after arriving with Lerner, Mike Kulas and Matt Toschlog both played varying roles at Looking Glass before going on to found *Descent*-creator Parallax Software in 1995. They still run studios today – the former is now the president of Volition, and the latter president of Outrage.

"Everyone at Looking Glass was just so amazingly talented," remembers **Tim Stellmach**, now design group manager at Vicarious Visions, but originally one of Church's curious friends. "Even when flying completely by the seat of our pants, they were all just a joy to work with."

Blue skies

This unusual mix was, however, a potent one. In Neurath, the studio had an experienced founder dedicated to creating new game experiences. Following the assignation of Spector, in Origin it had a sympathetic publisher. In Church it had a great programmer who emerged as a natural leader, and in its other young graduates it had a pool of brainpower equal to the challenges they faced.

"Being near MIT was critical for getting people smart enough to invent a genre," Blackley reckons. "Remember that the art of games at that point in 3D was really the art of technology. We had an artist for every two to three programmers."

Older than many recruits, **Eric Brosius** was otherwise a typically unjaded Looking Glass recruit – he played in a local band, TRIBE, that caught the ear of staff, and after writing music for *Terra Nova* he was hired as a sound designer, eventually becoming audio director. "Looking Glass was teeming with fresh-out-of-MIT intellectuals," he recalls. "They were extremely passionate about games and debated topics like 'simulation vs emulation' as if the honour of the Klingon race depended upon it."

This theory-of-gameplay culture that emerged at Looking Glass is somewhat unique. When Spector first came to our attention with *Deus Ex* in the late '90s, he stood out for talking about things like the 'grammar' of games. Even at GDC 2004, a session entered late on 'setting aesthetic goals and sticking to them' that quoted Caillois' Axis Of Ludus Versus Paida turned out to be from Looking Glass veteran Stellmach. When an audience member piped up with some bolshy, erudite comments from the back, it was almost inevitably Stellmach's *Thief* teammate, programmer Matt LeBlanc.

Hardly made from the same stuff as videogaming's infamous 'Skools Out' generation of a decade earlier, with its

LIFE AT LEGENDARY STUDIO NO PICNIC: NO. 1
The heat is on

"Like all developers, we'd work really late into the night, and this being before the tech boom the building we were in would shut off the air conditioning and the elevators," remembers Seamus Blackley. "We'd be trapped, and in the summer with all the computers it would get to 100 degrees at 90 per cent humidity. Hell." But the creators of *System Shock* could hardly accept their predicament. "We'd set up a system of fans blowing from the fire exits into the offices and around the halls – an amateur HVAC system," says Blackley. "Twenty young developers awake for a week at a time in a dark office in a nameless corporate park sweating into their keyboards, creating the future."

LIFE AT LEGENDARY STUDIO NO PICNIC: NO. 2
A tale from the underworld

"The last few months of *Underworld*'s development were the most personally and professionally satisfying time of my life," remembers Warren Spector.

"Paul Neurath and I determined that the only way to bring *Ultima Underworld* to completion was to get the team out of the Blue Sky offices in New Hampshire and into one room, someplace closer to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where they all lived. Distractions and travel time were killing productivity.

"I ended up moving to Cambridge, and basically lived with the team in a draughty basement room in a government welfare office. The entire team squeezed into one room, dragging beach chairs down there and propping their keyboards in their laps. We had to stuff towels under the doors to keep the wind from whistling through the place. A fax machine was our link to the outside world.

"In that crummy little over-crowded office, the *Underworld* team cranked out a work of art. The place was alive with activity – coding, design, testing, documentation writing, people bitching about problems, shouting ideas, cranking away. It was intense and unbelievable."

AND THE REST



CAR & DRIVER
(1992, Electronic Arts)
PC
Boasting ten physically modelled cars to drive around various racetracks in true 3D, *Car & Driver* might be seen as an attempt to bring 3D freedom to racing games. Not a great success.

JOHN MADDEN FOOTBALL '93
(1993, Electronic Arts)
Mega Drive
A massive hit, this version of *Madden* for EA was ironically one of Looking Glass Studios' best-selling games.



COMMAND & CONQUER
(1995, Electronic Arts)
Nintendo 64
Looking Glass invented *Command & Conquer* on the N64 and Westwood later took it the PC. (Just kidding: that's one of things the developer didn't do.)

FLIGHT UNLIMITED II
(1997, Eidos)
PC
The terrain data-capturing satellite was pointed south to San Francisco's Bay Area, while new additions included air traffic control and weather systems.





THIEF GOLD
(1999 Eidos)
PC
With a few extra missions and behind-the-scenes footage, *Thief Gold* helped Looking Glass reap benefits from the great press the original received.

FLIGHT UNLIMITED III
(1999, Electronic Arts)
PC
More planes, better air traffic control and weather, several new areas to fly over, and a DIY level editor. A fourth part and departure for the series – *Flight Combat* – was never finished.





DESTRUCTION DERBY 64
(1999, THQ)
Nintendo 64
A competent enough outing with four-way multiplayer racing.

academic mindset Looking Glass represents a unique historical moment when games were sufficiently established to attract the brightest, while being just bright enough was still sufficient to make a game.

"The first time I met the *Underworld* team, I walked in on them in the middle of a conversation in Old English!" remembers Spector. "The game industry is made up of really smart people, but Looking Glass was over the top. Every day was like a little Game Developers Conference. They were a very special bunch and they were part of a culture that valued thought and intellectual rigor. Origin was like going to college; Looking Glass was like grad school."

"You have to remember that back then it was a very weird thing to be in the game business," notes Blackley. "We weren't really sure it was a valid career. So many things that we were doing were totally new to us, and to the world, that we naturally tried to understand why what we were doing was so interesting and how we could make it better. That's the scientific process, and it's what we were all trained in. So we naturally started thinking that way."

Tools and technology

"Early on there was a lot of trying multiple approaches, improvising and seeing what happened," says Church. "That sort of environment is hard to come by, and certainly risky, but has a real up side when it works."

was obvious, but it also affected production," recalls Stellmach. "For example, there was a tremendous focus on design tools from *Ultima Underworld* onward, which meant the designers were empowered to experiment with different ideas as they went through implementation."

Take Looking Glass' innovations in sound. Hitherto largely a sensory blandishment, in several Looking Glass games the sound is as important as the graphics. (*Thief* was the first game in which you could eavesdrop on gossiping guards and where you had to listen to your footsteps to judge whether the guards could hear you.)

"Games like *Thief* and *System Shock 2* were designed from the beginning with the thought that audio should be more than just ear-candy," recalls Brosius. "Because the designers really wanted audio to have gameplay significance, programmers spent valuable time developing tools so a non-programmer like myself could implement sounds in the game." It was a novel idea at the time – and it has proved to be the right one.

This burst of intelligent game development blazed an enviable trail. In just a few years, Looking Glass produced the revolutionary *Ultima Underworld*, *System Shock*, *Terra Nova*, *Flight Unlimited* and *Thief* as well as superior sequels, plus a few conversions and inevitable also-rans. The only reasonable parallel might be Bullfrog,

"The Underworld team was special. The Flight guys were incredible. It was like everyone at Looking Glass was on a mission from God"

The young staff worked in open-plan 'pits' instead of cubicles or offices, leading to banter and cross-fertilisation. Teams were small, and development cheap. There was virtually no bureaucracy, no specialisation and, it's said, very little ego. "Changing things was a core value," recalls Spector. "Teamwork was a core value."

Above all, Looking Glass valued innovation. When people proposed unchallenging or commercially motivated projects, they were all but shouted down. It was the right atmosphere for forging new genres. "The effect on the proposal process

although design-wise Peter Molyneux's studio was more a one-man show. Spector pulls no punches: "The *Underworld* team was really special. The *System Shock* team was equally special. The *Flight* guys were incredible. It was like everyone at Looking Glass was on a mission from God."

Glass half full

But if the Looking Glass formula was so successful, where is the studio now? Surely if gamers truly love innovation, it deserved a better reward for its run of genre-benders than to be shut down? Did the games not

sell? Is there a grain of truth in the following jokey aside from Spector: "Frankly, I think one of Looking Glass' problems was that everyone there assumed everyone else in the world was like them – and, man, were they wrong!"

That's the prevailing view of many in the videogame industry. Looking Glass was too innovative. Beyond reviewers, game developers and a select breed of PC aficionados, its games were overlooked in favour of me-too mediocrity.

Fortunately, the facts don't support this view. Some titles disappointed, particularly *Terra Nova*, but most Looking Glass titles were commercially successful, including the showcases *Ultima Underworld* and *Thief* – the former selling half a million copies alone.

It might be hard to accept that pioneering Looking Glass could die an

and some have revealed since that the studio's last hours involved happy toasts to its achievements. After all, it had successfully launched not just several new IPs, but new genres as well.

"Looking Glass survived as a studio for ten years, and we got to do a bunch of cool and challenging games that were fun, if very hard, to develop," says Church. "In games, a large part of the reward was just being involved. With 50-plus-person teams that's harder, but with five people, just being able to do the creative work you believe in and care about full time is pretty cool."

Mission complete

"Very few are ever rewarded for the risks they take," reflects Blackley. "Generally the second or third people who try a new thing reap the reward, and are frequently even credited with the invention.

"Plenty are making tons of money exploiting ideas first conceived at Looking Glass. It's almost like we were gaming's Xerox PARC"

ordinary sort of death, but that appears to be what happened. A couple of unlucky breaks, cashflow issues, canned projects (including *Flight Combat*, also known as *Janes' Attack Squadron*, a Star Trek title called *Voyager* and the Microsoft-signed *Deep Cover*) and the rising cost of development eventually overwhelmed the studio. A late sale to *Thief* publisher Eidos might have saved it, but the British company caught troubles of its own at Ion Storm. Some fans have never forgiven it.

"The 'blame Ion Storm' or 'blame Eidos' stuff is utter nonsense," says Spector (who eventually inherited Ion Storm Austin, having become a full-time Looking Glass employee in 1996 with a remit to establish a Looking Glass Austin wing). "Looking Glass died a death of a thousand cuts. There was no conspiracy, no bad guy.

"There were some bad business decisions, some bad development decisions, a little too much emphasis on innovation and intelligence over commercial considerations and, ultimately, the natural dissolution of The Great Group. Magic moments only last, well, a moment."

Many Looking Glass staff were stoical,

"Looking Glass was no different – monetarily. But I think the fans know the score, which is pretty cool. A lot of times, when I'm getting down about whatever crazy scheme I'm trying to get going, I look back at those days and remember how much a crazy group of people can really accomplish."

One clear difference between games and music and movies is that the achievements of nearly all games are rapidly superseded, at least technically. While Looking Glass veterans remember their time fondly and the current generation of developers and critics is alive to their contribution, few new gamers will ever play the originals.

Imagine the excitement if a lost Beatles album was discovered tomorrow. Progress in games is, in contrast, an endless cycle of putting our best albums into the rubbish bin. So it goes with Looking Glass' classics.

Church: "If you mean 'was the studio rewarded for trying things out?', well, some people loved the games and others complained we put action in their RPG or stats in their action or whatever. If by reward you mean 'cash' or 'influence', obviously

MIRROR CRACK'D

Here's where a few of the many worthy Looking Glass alumni ended up...

SEAMUS BLACKLEY
has enjoyed several diverting careers, and is now at Hollywood talent agency CAA. "I wear a tie and make thousands of phone calls a day," he explains, cheerfully.



ERIC BROSIUS
is audio director at Irrational Studios in Boston. Irrational was founded by several key Looking Glass veterans, including general manager Ken Levine, the man who first conceived of *Thief*.



DOUG CHURCH
now works for Eidos' US development division, where he's believed to be working on the next *Tomb Raider*. "Salt the fries!" he doubtless says, according to Looking Glass tradition.



PAUL NEURATH
founded Floodgate Entertainment in 2000. It was responsible for the *Neverwinter Nights* expansion pack *Shadows Of Undrendite*.



WARREN SPECTOR
is studio director at Ion Storm, and was project director on the Looking Glass-inspired *Deus Ex*. Many ex-LG staff work for him. "We're not Looking Glass," he says, "but I hope in some small way we're carrying the torch."



TIM STELLMACH
is the design group manager at Vicarious Visions and the project manager for the Xbox version of *Doom 3*.



not. Warren's group did *Deus Ex*, which was great, but it isn't like Looking Glass folks have taken the ideas and directions laid out there and continued them in other places."

Church believes that Looking Glass has already pretty much vacated gaming's radar: "In the US especially, old PC games aren't much looked at. And Looking Glass games were always a niche, even on the PC." He accepts that interesting games are arriving that push player choice even further than Looking Glass' titles, but he sees no connection: "It isn't that I think the style of game Looking Glass cared about died, but rather I don't think of those games as Looking Glass-influenced."

The legacy

The question of lineage is a thorny one in videogames, but it's puzzling why an industry that happily cites *Doom* as the father of the FPS or *Populous* as the start of god gaming shouldn't extend similar parental blagging rights to Looking Glass' breakthrough titles.

"I think, industry-wide, people are finally beginning to come around to more of an Looking Glass-ish view of what games are all about," is how Spector puts it. "Lots of folks talk now about putting players first, about choice and consequence, about immersion and emergence – all of that stuff got started at Looking Glass.

"Plenty are making tons of money exploiting ideas first conceived at Looking Glass. It's almost like Looking Glass was the Xerox PARC of the game industry."

Besides this organic influence, Looking Glass alumni pop up everywhere. Blackley's ambitious firstperson actioner *Trespasser* pushed a Looking Glass-ish envelope a step too far, but Warren Spector's *Deus Ex* and *Thief: Deadly Shadows* projects are surely inculcating a new generation of developers with Looking Glass sensibilities. Irrational Games, which was largely responsible for *System Shock 2*, has since released the fashion-defying *Freedom Force*. And Looking Glass wunderkind Church is rumoured to be the man bringing Lara Croft back from the dead at Crystal Dynamics.

"The folks who made Looking Glass games special have infiltrated several studios, and brought a Looking Glass sensibility to places that might never have developed it on their own," Spector concludes. "That can't help but change the face of gaming, probably on a scale Looking Glass couldn't have dreamed of. The legacy lives on."

Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Scores broadly correspond to the following sentiments: zero: nothing, one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

Edge's most played

Disgaea

After its 9/10 on import, the recent PAL release was the perfect excuse to go back to hell. Sitting exams and addressing parliament has never been such fun.



[PS2] Koei

Transformers

A deserved number one hit in Australia (home of developer Melbourne House), and we're still enjoying the view from up here in the glider…



[PS2] Atari

Powerdrome

It's an institution: eye jelly-drying 30-lap marathons around the Acer Naim ring, inching milliseconds closer to that perfect time and 1,200mph racing line.



[Xbox] Evolved

Atsumare!! Made In Wario

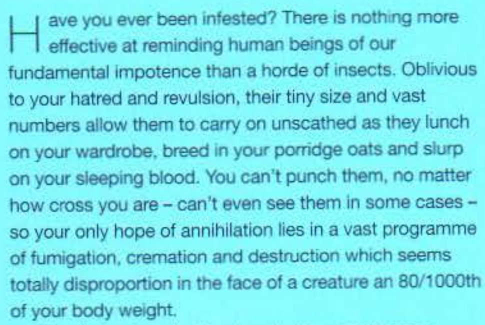
The definition of a perfect party game? One where you can have a ball even when you're too addled to notice that you've got a controller in your hand.



[GC] Nintendo

Man vs bug

Why videogames shouldn't have fleas



Have you ever been infested? There is nothing more effective at reminding human beings of our fundamental impotence than a horde of insects. Oblivious to your hatred and revulsion, their tiny size and vast numbers allow them to carry on unscathed as they lunch on your wardrobe, breed in your porridge oats and slurp on your sleeping blood. You can't punch them, no matter how cross you are – can't even see them in some cases – so your only hope of annihilation lies in a vast programme of fumigation, cremation and destruction which seems totally disproportion in the face of a creature an 80/1000th of your body weight.

It's all about scale. Arachnophobia wasn't scary because Jeff Daniels made that terrified face over and over, it was scary because the spiders were tiny. Tiny, unstoppable and unavoidable. What's surprising is that the opposite is true in videogames. Mostly, enemies in games are tiny comparative to the characters you play. Not necessarily visually, since they'll often stand shoulder to shoulder with you, but in terms of the threat they pose. There are obvious examples, such as the swarms that confront you in *Serious Sam* (below), but even threats as haunting as the redeads in *Ocarina Of Time* soon become something you dismiss as you run breezily past. In games, the more of something there is, the weaker they generally are. And in videogames, unlike in infested bedrooms, many and weak doesn't cause you sleepless nights.

It's this trend that *Full Spectrum Warrior* bucks so dramatically. Everything that faces you here is strictly 1:1. Each target you face is as potent and mobile as your men. There's no cannon fodder, no enemies who artificially weaken as your health bar grows like Pinocchio's nose and your guns double in size. Throughout the game, one man with one weapon can leave you as impotent and defenceless as a hornet's nest would in real life. The same is true, even more radically, of distance. In games, we're used to jogging hundreds of yards without a thought. Space and movement are freely expendable. In *Full Spectrum Warrior*, those five feet between parked cars matter, because they're the five feet the corpse of your rifleman will fill when a lucky bullet spirals through his face and out his shoulder. It's all about scale.




098


100


102


103

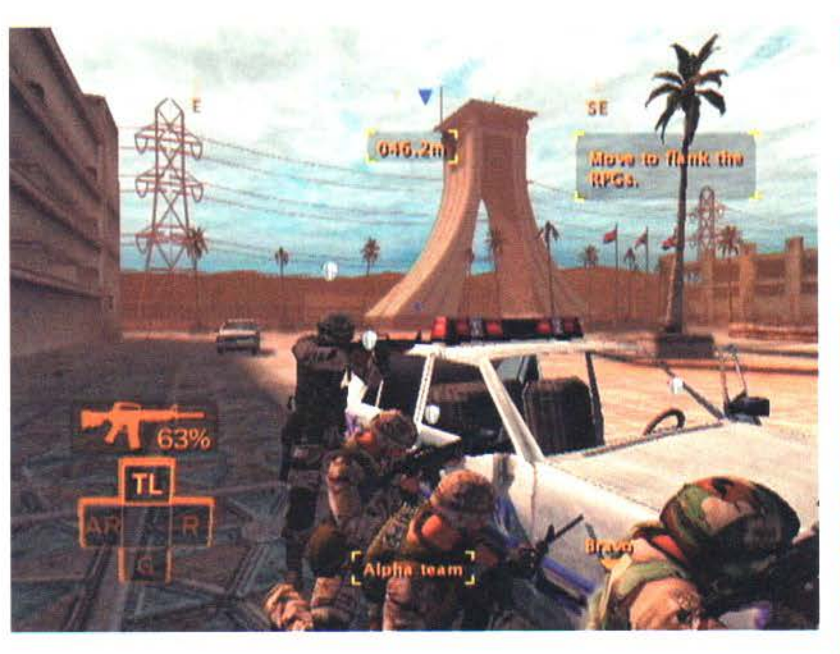

104

Full Spectrum Warrior

Format: **Xbox (version tested) PC** Publisher: **THQ** Developer: **Pandemic** Price: **£40** Release: **25 June (Xbox) TBC (PC)**




Both your own and enemy cover degrades under fire. Crates and abandoned sofas won't buy you more than a few seconds of safety





This is a game which ought to answer two of the most pressing questions facing gaming today: how valuable is the integration of 'realism' into a necessarily artificial world, and what happens when that realism causes videogames to trespass onto a political minefield. *Full Spectrum Warrior*, adapted for the public from an exacting US army training tool, carries as many 'really real' badges as the most disciplined flight simulator, and gives gamers the chance to corner infidels in back alleys at a time when allegations of allied brutality are becoming a matter of verified record rather than tabloid hysteria.

It's worth being clear, then: this isn't a fusty lecture series fudged on to an Xbox disk. From the beginning, the US army demanded a proper videogame, something their soldiers would voluntarily take back to their barracks after hours, but it's not a gung-ho bullet-guzzler. *FSW* gives you command of two four-man dismounted infantry squads. These aren't dumb pawns, but trained soldiers, so your responsibilities only extend to moving them into position and setting their fire sectors. The soldiers will adopt the correct formations in accordance with their environment, and they'll acquire and destroy targets on their own once ordered to.

This isn't as dry and disembodied as it sounds. Although you are in effect the camera, jogging along with your squad is intensely involving. You'll be splattered with their blood when they are shot, and rocked and deafened when you call in a mortar strike closer to your position than you should. The realistic nature of the scenarios means you'll spend a lot of your time running away, but the combat is simple, stressful and compelling. Finding your men under fire is both pulverising and paralysing, and there's immense satisfaction in gaining the experience to think clearly and tactically when things start to unravel. The missions, structured around a single unfolding battle in a sanitised amalgam of Mogadishu, Basra and Kabul, will see you calling in air strikes o tank positions, threading through littered alleys, and subduing balcony snipers.

The missions will see you calling in air strikes on tank positions, threading through littered alleys, and subduing balcony snipers

Important though the issues of reality an morality are, *FSW* has some videogame questions to answer first. The decision to lock the camera around the leader of each squad is logical, but can prove enormously frustrating. Not being able to direct your men to move to a car six feet away because the camera is sitting too low behind your cover t let you line up the cursor is unforgivably annoying. That cursor – an innovative system which lets you set destination and formation with one sweep of the stick – can itself get stuck on objects or deny you a command that is visibly feasible.

Your men are diligently programmed – both in AI and animation – to be believable human individuals, and as such it's only fair t




The realtime fog of war effect greys out areas not under surveillance by your men. A useful tool, its importance is reduced from the army version, which allows you to set individual fire sectors





The orange cursor system flows around the geography of the level, letting you preview the positions your men will take up when ordered





expect some fallibility. However, it can be costly. One man will fumble a formation on a corner, lose cover and take a hit. Now, you have to move to recover him, which means taking more fire. And suddenly it's game over, even though you gave the right command to the right men and at the right time. Regardless of the realistic context, your brain is more likely to blame the game than the random cruelty of war.

But how real is real? As ever, what most undermines the reality is not what's there, but what isn't. The city is almost totally deserted, save for crows and carcasses, side-stepping the thorny question of collateral damage. The 'fast forward' option, an inspired invention which lets you speed through replays of failed missions before picking your moment to 'jump in' and regain control of your men, causes troops' voices to speed up with helium hilarity. The worthy decision to include international forces is undermined by the crude stereotyping of the jolly-hockey-sticks British sergeants, who all but tote their SA-80s with a pinkie sticking out. The clumsy ragdoll deaths, the deep-throat "Nooooo!" when someone takes a hit, the bombast of the music all undermine *FSW*'s achievements as a videogame – an irony, since their introduction was almost certainly intended to bolster its standing as an 'entertainment product'.

So if the reality falls short, how questionable is the morality? Pandemic's argument was that whatever your stance on current US military activity, no one had any hostility to the individual soldiers. After all, a foot soldier's selfless obedience is the bulwark of any army, in any time and of any nation. Of course, that's an image that's taken a nasty battering over the last months, but it's one that your Full Spectrum Warriors manage to live up to. Their distracted jubilation at a confirmed kill, their clumsy mutterings about emails and Game Boys (sorry, 'handhelds'), their silent revulsion at festering mass graves have an honesty as well as a naive idealism.

Whatever you conclude about the bigger picture, this is special stuff. The claustrophobic buzz of flies, the distant muezzin drone, the desperation as you crouch uncertain in the dust while your men call frantically for orders will lodge in your mind long after you've walked away from the game. T-junctions may never feel safe ever again.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten



Two to tango

FSW offers no competitive multiplayer – the US army vetoed any hint of friendly fire fun from the outset – but Live coop works beautifully. Each player commands one squad, using headsets to coordinate pincer attacks and rescues. While you'll be replaying missions from the singleplayer, working together has a completely different rhythm to the incremental A-then-B-then-A-then-B of solo play. Expansion packs and new missions are a certainty, adding longevity to game which substantially enriches Xbox Live's range.

Thief: Deadly Shadows

Format: **Xbox (version tested) PC** Publisher: **Eidos** Developer: **Ion Storm** Price: **£40 (Xbox) £35 (PC)** Release: **June 18**





Stealing from under the city watchmen's noses is entertaining, but avoiding them can become a chore later in the plotline

It's somewhat fitting, given *Thief*'s backdrop of infighting and betrayal, that the fiercely loyal *Thief* fan community has had its knives out for *Deadly Shadows* ever since its post-Looking Glass resurrection. This review's score, when it reaches those fans, could be taken as a vindication of that ill feeling, which would be a shame, as the game certainly hasn't been irredeemably recast for lowest-common-denominator appeal. If nothing else, *Deadly Shadows* is half of an amazing *Thief* game.

The opening mission's highlighted objectives and pop-up instructions may feel heavy-handed for a series that has never underestimated its players' intelligence, but this is simply an explanation of the *Thief* mindset, not a simplification of it, and will be a welcome lifeline to newcomers or lapsed burglars alike. Once the tutorial segues into the game proper, further coaching is relegated to loading screen tips (which show a cavalier disregard for plot spoilers) and our antihero's wry narration. Other than the often staggering jump in visual quality, everything is as it should be: the sprawling nightscape of the City remains a stage for the Pagan, Hammer and Keeper factions and their conflicting ideologies, with Garrett still inextricably knotted in their fates as a holy thief.

Staunch purists can play the entire game in firstperson, but doing so will deprive them of a remarkably well-realised experience





Dirty epic

For the most part, *Deadly Shadows*' story is relayed with the colour-washed shadowplay cut-scenes that are the *Thief* series' distinctive hallmark, and these remain some of gaming's most enthralling movie sequences where practically nothing happens. This time around, though, they alternate with in-engine cut-scenes, which are somewhat lacklustre in comparison. Also absent are the moodily presented extracts from faction philosophies that previously bookended each mission: these have been reduced to slumming it as loading screen flavour text.

It remains your choice whether Garrett's passing leaves a trail of murders, light concussions or no trace he was ever there; if a carelessly open window is an invitation or none of your business; whether you steal only what you need or leave your victims destitute. However dubious the morality of your actions, you can lay the blame on society: each faction is equal parts justified and monstrous, and the City itself, perhaps *Deadly Shadows*' strongest character, is tangibly built on the bones of treacheries past. There's a compelling density to the world, a suggestion that behind the environments isn't just skybox and void but layer upon layer of history, right down to an unfathomable (and certainly unconventional) blackness. Thief has always been dark fantasy at its darkest, but *Deadly Shadows* is almost relentlessly grim, which will come as a guilty relief to those expecting it to be toned down.



As for the supposed travesty of *Thief* in thirdperson, staunch purists can play the entire game in firstperson, but doing so will deprive them of a remarkably well-realised experience. Garrett moves with a taut physicality that's noticeably less apparent in firstperson, and flourishes such as his untroubled vaults over balustrades or practiced flick of the wrist after a blackjack strike are expressive without resorting to inappropriate acrobatics. It's also proof that the enforced loss of peripheral vision isn't integral to *Thief*'s cloying intensity, as the game can provide this ably from either perspective.

That atmosphere is a product of the dizzying size of Garrett's stalking grounds – their monolithic facades, cavernous halls and mazelike passageways suffused with evening fog or subterranean shadow – and their patrolling occupants. Playing the standard difficulty only hints at the danger these wanderers present: they'll remark on an unexpected noise, misplaced valuables or disturbed furniture, but then rationalise it away. Such self-doubt is all but absent on harder settings, and the slightest disturbance will set them hunting you down with eerily methodical precision.

Series veterans may find there's no individual mission that can compare to past highlights like the nails-down-a-blackboard dread of Return To The Cathedral or the emergent possibilities of Life Of The Party.

Previously in E125, E136









A memorable first for *Thief* is this fleeting dawn mission in the City's abandoned, overgrown outskirts. The game's traditional midnight darkness feels even more suffocating on your return



Thieves' tools and supplies must now be purchased with your ill-gotten gains. The overly generous pricing means you'll seldom have to ration your spending, however

but they remain admirably clever pieces of level design.

Any slackness in the missions themselves has to be carried by the City's newfound role as a cohesive overworld, and such a forceful change to *Thief*'s structure is not without its problems. Initially, the beautifully realised districts are an enthralling distraction between the chunks of plot. They teem with targets of opportunity, optional tasks to overhear and culs-de-sac down which to escape the largely ineffectual city watch. But when the game relies on the City to carry the plot in place of missions – most frustratingly during the pivotal story arc, which requires repeated travel from one side to the other, punctuated by loading times – it's uncomfortably overextended. Less damaging to pacing, but just as clumsy, are occasions where your list of objectives erupts into a mess of citywide tasks and prospective missions. The effect is more overwhelming than open-ended, and isn't necessarily a step forward from the linear progression of previous *Thief* games, where freeform play was perfectly evident within the missions themselves.

Though the side-quests are entertaining, it becomes increasingly inappropriate to sidetrack as the plot's apocalyptic prophecy looms. Misjudged pacing eventually affects the missions of the story arc itself, and while the first half of the game passes in a breathless rush of varied settings and gameplay styles, the final section is subdued, leaving you expecting a climax (and at least one more mission) that never arrives. In the absence of either, the narrative's closure is far too brief and non-committal to satisfyingly conclude either the game's plot or the overall trilogy.

Should this all sound too damning, consider that *Deadly Shadows*' disappointments are made so stark only because its best moments are so exhilarating. Few games can display a synergy of mechanic, art and sound design in this way, and generally it's only these self-set high standards that *Deadly Shadows* fails to maintain. When the original came out in 1998, there was nothing like it; even now, with stealth titles all-pervasive, there's still nothing like *Thief*.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten



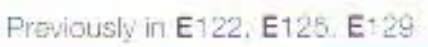


The likes of an opened furnace door can instantly flood a reassuringly shadowed area with treacherous light

Pikmin 2

Format: GameCube Publisher: Nintendo Developer: In-house Price: ¥6,800 (£34) Release: Out now (Japan) Summer (UK)

Previously in E122, E125, E129













Olimar is accompanied by his weedier, taller brother Louie (Olimar's Japanese name is an anagram of Mario, inevitably), and controlling each independently lets you solve complex puzzles and hatch elaborate assaults



Blue Pikmin are impervious to water, making them ideal for this kind of bridge-building work. They're not exactly fireproof, however, unlike the tough reds. Yellows are no longer demolitions experts, instead tackling electric fences and zapping beetles. They're still the lightest of the bunch, and can be tossed over high obstacles

Lose your marbles

In multiplayer, *Pikmin 2* is remarkably successful. The multiple ways to win – collecting prize marbles, killing your opponent (or all his Pikmin) or stealing his marker marble – means tactics constantly evolve. Should both armies meet, then seeing a scrum of screaming Pikmin let loose on each other will raise the hairs on the back of your neck and laughs from the bottom of your belly.

Of all the great gaming tunes, *Pikmin*'s drowsy lullaby is one of the hardest to shake. It's clearly endured in Nintendo's mind as clearly as our own, and so it and much of the first game's peculiar magic has been transported wholesale for the sequel. The anemone-bright herds of obliging Pikmin and the delicate detail of the gardens soften the edges of what would otherwise be a stubbornly serious strategy game. Space captain Olimar must lead his tiny army, protecting them from predators, unleashing them on likely prey and trusting them to build, kill, carry or shove according to context.

The major change is that instead of collecting parts to repair his rocket, Olimar is on a fund-raising trip, scouring the galaxy for likely bric-a-brac which could be sold to help pay off his debts. Consequently, the 30-day limit of the first game has gone. Although the day/night cycle remains, you now have as much time as you want to search for tangerines and batteries. This shift better suits the game's idyllic atmosphere, and delivers players from the tyranny of repeating days over and over until performed perfectly. The price is the loss of strategic complexity, since the game no longer hinges on planning intricate combinations of forays, and the loss of the emotional weight of the game, which hung so heavy when every cock-up took Olimar one day closer to death.

Also new are the cave sections. These have no puzzles and no day or night, just booty and baddies. Repetitive and limited, as well as giving you a break from the timed nature of the main game they also contain the new purple and white Pikmin. These can only be made by converting ordinary Pikmin in vast flowers which bloom deep underground. Their skills – the purples are ten times stronger and heavier, the white both poisonous and immune to poison – open up a new level of puzzle sophistication which compensates a little for the loss of the time constraints.

It's easy to forget, in this world of milk-bottle tops and Kiwi shoe polish, that *Pikmin* is a creation of pure, unapologetic imagination. At a time when Nintendo's status as a creative powerhouse is slipping, *Pikmin 2* demonstrates that there's still no company that can touch it when it works its alchemy of rigorous play mechanics, artistic excellence, irrepressibly communicative characters and all-round appeal.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Onimusha 3: Demon Siege

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house (Production Studio 2)** Price: **$50 (£30)** Release: **Out now (US, Japan) September (UK)**

Previously in **E123, E125, E134, E136**

Here's the dilemma: do you chastise a sequel regardless of achievement because it fails to significantly push its series forward, or do you accept the few tweaks and additions typically displayed by follow-ups as sufficient evolution, given that the game's very nature discourages daring development? Fans yearn for more of the same, while the game enthusiast tends to favour innovation over franchise loyalty.

The latest *Onimusha* mostly treads a path well travelled by its commercially successful predecessors, but does at least attempt some considered deviations. Most significant in this respect is the narrative (see 'Killing time'), which involves the player taking control of two characters in two timezones. While most of the action occurs separately within each temporally divided setting, occasionally collaboration is necessary. Ultimately, this puzzle-solving component (with the activities of the one in the past affecting the one in the present) is mostly underused, relying on the core demon-slashing mechanic instead.

Here, not much has changed. The cutting down of enemies and the timing of soul collecting (for weapon or equipment upgrade purposes) remain finely implemented and as satisfying as ever. Granted, the introduction of analogue control has done much to improve overall fluidity in terms of navigation and combat, but it also serves to highlight the limitations of the interaction available – the fight system may be enjoyable, but pales in comparison with that of recent competitors.

Also disappointing is the constant to-and-fro progression, a cheap and rapidly ageing dynamic. More positive is the inclusion of Ako, a fairy-like entity who can be tasked with a variety of helpful duties (such as health regeneration or faster soul absorption) and therefore serves a genuine strategic purpose as well as allowing simple resource management through the occasional exchange of items between the characters.

Which brings us back to that opening paragraph. Most of what *Onimusha 3* does it does well, yet little within it is new or unexpected and series veterans are unlikely to share the level of enticement that a newcomer will invariably experience. It's easy to forget just how precious few of the genre's many exponents ever attain this level of competence, of course, but that said it's not unreasonable to have hoped for a little more innovation from Capcom.

Edge rating: **Seven** out of **ten**











Jacques' whip-based weapons and their object- and enemy-grabbing abilities bring some tactical variety into the game



Now that environments are in 3D, the game camera can occasionally prove to be a little clumsy, particularly during the confinements of interior settings. Mirrors throughout the game allow saves



Killing time

Onimusha 3 sees Akechi Samanosuke return to face the Genma King only to find himself in present-day Paris, now also under Genma threat. In return, policeman Jacques Blanc gets zapped back to 16th century Japan and is soon Gitanes-deep in Genma henchmen. The jump between the two times is carefully balanced and serves to reduce monotony while carrying the (wonderfully absurd) narrative along.

Samurai Warriors

Format: PlayStation2 Publisher: Koei Developer: Omega Force Price: £40 Release: Out now

Previously in E135







As is traditional for the series, each fighter can build up to an apocalyptic Musou attack that will rout even the most stubborn enemy





Replay it again

One of *Samurai Warriors'* selling points is its sheer size. Aside from the multiple missions there are also challenge modes, endurance tests, one-on-one options and even a new training school that allows you to create your own officer from scratch to fight in his or her unique campaign. However, the main event's replay value is so limited as to render the task of completing them all an ordeal few will be prepared to undertake.



Samurai Warriors at least brings unconventional additions to the roster, such as priestess Okuni, who cuts through the enemy with a parasol





Koei's *Dynasty Warriors* series has proved both enduring and enduringly popular – this seventh instalment (including expansions) sold some 600,000 copies in its first week on sale in Japan – despite being established on the simplest of premises (assume the role of a near-sociopathic soldier and plough through anyone and anything that stands in your way).

It's easy to understand the basic appeal – after all, what wannabe warlord hasn't dreamed of turning the tide of battle by themselves, valiantly inspiring their vastly outnumbered allies to an unlikely victory while almost singlehandedly routing the enemy? There's one foe the franchise's fighters are finding it difficult to overcome: the law of diminishing returns. The central mechanic has remained the same for some years, and it's starting to feel a little rusty.

As the game's prefix suggests, this latest outing finds the franchise's seemingly infinite – and interchangeable – reserves of soldiers and psychopaths decamping from their familiar feudal Chinese setting to Japan's savage Sengoku period, a geographical realignment intended as a thank you to that country's loyal legions of fans. Precious little else has changed, though. Each homicidal hero – initially there are five to choose from, but many more may be unlocked as the action unfolds – has their own tale, subdivided into battles that must be completed in turn. Each campaign comprises a number of unique missions – Koei claims over 500 – that occasionally affect the path of the central character's progress. Each victory earns experience and skill points to spend on various upgrades and enhancements.

If this all sounds familiar then that's because it is, and at times depressingly so. Once the novelty of the new setting and storylines has worn off – and for all but the most dedicated die-hards, it will do so very quickly indeed – there's little genuine innovation to hold your interest. The introduction of indoor infiltration stages is a laudable attempt at providing variety, but they're ultimately so restrictive and repetitive that completing them becomes a chore.

Similarly, the new character types, including ninjas and musketeers, suggest stealth and artillery attacks may be an option on the battlefield, but in practice affrays are invariably settled by brute force and frenetic button mashing rather than any Machiavellian manoeuvres.

Edge rating: Five out of ten

Way Of The Samurai 2

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **Acquire** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now**

Followers of Acquire's feudal Japan titles – the first two *Tenchu* games and now the *Samurai* series – will know what to expect from *WOTS2*: a rudimentary graphics engine nearly excused by clean art design, a combat system that's complicated on paper yet apparently simplistic in practice, and a stirring Noriyuki Asakura score. With the exception of the soundtrack, it's not an immediately inviting proposition. Acquire fans will expect a studiously realised game behind the rough edges, and *WOTS2* lives up to that form, too.

Where the first title saw your roaming samurai upset the equilibrium between a village's warring clans, the sequel's setting, the island of Amahara, houses a three-way power struggle between the populace, the overzealous magistrates, and an avaricious Yakuza gang. It covers a considerably larger area, at first suggesting an almost *GTA*-like environment, but the districts are small and exist in their own private universes – moving from one to the next is accomplished on a map. Even so, the illusion of freedom is welcome, and a relaxed seven-day timeframe replaces the previously tight two-day limit.

However, without the intimacy of that limit and the original's enclosed gameworld, there's less sense that a carefully plotted spider's web of cause and effect underlies every moment. It's all too possible to slip between story events and spend half the game resigned to randomly generated jobs, downtime that exposes the underlying rigidity. That's arguably a fair trade for expanding the game beyond a series of vignettes, but the two styles of play can sit uneasily. Accepting a random mission to an area containing a plot branch unavoidably fails the former while you deal with the latter. Defeat a plot-related character in a duel and you have seconds to make an undignified scramble for the spoils before a cut-scene whisks you away.

Such flaws would be crippling in a title with a different play dynamic, but *WOTS2*'s intentionally short running time (most story paths can be finished in a little over two hours), a steady stream of unlockable rewards, and the gradual appreciation of its combat system's depth can make replays strangely compelling. Several times in, you'll either achieve a Zen-like determination to experience all it can offer, or decide that the process is more laborious than labour of love. Appropriately, the way of the samurai is not for everyone.

Edge rating: Six out of ten









Curiously, failing missions results in a cold shoulder from the power group concerned, but massacring every man in their headquarters is generally forgotten about when you return







Ideally, even a mass battle can be finished with a series of decisive finishing strikes, triggered by goading attackers into losing their balance. Higher difficulty settings impart a one-hit-kill severity to sword duels similar to *Bushido Blade*



She's behind you

Our **E**116 review of the original opined that 'dubbing would have been preferable' to the subtitled Japanese voiceovers, but *WOTS2* is proof that we should be careful what we wish for. The graceless dub (the only option) is at best passable, and at worst cringingly bad – witness psychotic assassin Kyojiro being voiced with all the menace of a pantomime villainess.

La Pucelle Tactics

Format: PlayStation2 Publisher: Mastiff Developer: Nippon Ichi Price: $50 (£28) Release: Out now (US) TBC (UK)











Although released in the west after *Disgaea*, *La Pucelle* is in fact the previous Nippon Ichi game. *Disgaea* fans will have to wait for this winter's *Phantom Brave* for a real sequel



The battlefields are isometric 3D, and can be rotated round the four compass points. As a system, it's not quite flexible enough, especially when you need to be sure you've located all the dark tiles

Gaming doesn't do satire very well. Actually, it rarely does bog-standard funny well, so expecting it to muster anything more sophisticated is an ambitious long shot. *La Pucelle*, however, which is fundamentally the story of some renegade nuns, gets as close to the Christian fundamentalist bone as its adorable graphics will allow – Baptism Attack included. It's an unexpected pleasure, and one compounded by the game's goofy addiction to naming places and characters after elements of French cuisine.

This is a simpler, plainer game than *Disgaea*, for which many will be grateful. Despite the *Tactics* title, it's less demanding and more immediate than its little sister. It's clear where many of *Disgaea*'s inheritances have come from – individual battles are fought out separately within each player turn, levelling up applies immediately afterwards, and the game encourages you to 'cheat' by canceling and reusing character movement. Building your team relies on a more traditional mechanic of capturing and training the monsters you fight.

Battlefields are contaminated with dark tiles, which produce streams of energy that can be directed around the level by placing characters or markers and rotating their orientation, *Chu Chu Rocket* style. Once arranged to your satisfaction, they can be detonated to cause a chain of explosions, lightning or healing depending on how their colours have combined – always assuming enemies haven't moved in and caused their own diversions. The elegance of the system is spoiled by their secondary purposes: they also spawn enemies, and all dark tiles must be destroyed for a battle bonus and to prevent the area from turning into a Dark World gateway. Although, this being a Nippon Ichi RPG, it is of course possible to enter these gateways and take your chances with the potent demons and items that hide within.

It's clear *Pucelle* exists at an earlier stage of evolution than *Disgaea*. The story, though more sophisticated than most RPG hokum, lacks *Disgaea*'s diabolical glee. The dark tile system is hampered, and doesn't integrate as fully into battles as the colour-coded puzzles that its successor presented so well. While there isn't the sense of playing something that opens up a new era for a genre long written off as dying, there is a simple freshness and a delightful accessibility which might endear it to an even wider market.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEE** Developer: **Sony Bend** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

Previously in **E125**

Hopefully, the bad design underpinning *Omega Strain* is due to technical limitations, time constraints or an act of God. Because you can't seriously believe that a team of developers sat down and thought it would be a good idea to confuse and harass players to this degree. The essence of Sony Bend's game is to run around largish levels, taking out enemies and reaching waypoints to perform mission-critical actions – disarming bombs, taking water samples or unlocking doors, for instance. However, a dumb map, gloomy environments, constantly respawning enemies, irritating mission updates, time restrictions, poorly configured controls, badly placed checkpoints and idiotic AI rob this of enjoyment potential.

That's quite a list, so we'll deal with the most damaging first. *Omega Strain* takes place in a dreary, dreary world. The levels are so gloomy, grey and fog-drenched (there's even fog in the mall) that it's hard to see buildings in the near distance, never mind enemies. Dark, oppressive and torturous, *Omega Strain* is about as much fun as a wet weekend in a Kafka novel.

The design is also built around the idea of replaying levels. Ah, the irony. New objectives are thrown at you with abandon, so you may start off with two or three on one level, but will probably end up with eight or more, most of which you'll fail because you have little or no information about how to complete them. Add in the fact that many of these must be finished under strict time pressures, and you're often left bewildered and ranting. While most updated objectives are not critical to finishing a level, you'll still be thoroughly fed up by the time you limp over the finish line.

Checkpoint placement is erratic, too, with some levels placing them around every corner and others in one or two unknown, often illogical, locations. It's entirely possible to run out of ammo and respawn at a checkpoint riddled with enemies. Bullet dodging to collect more weaponry then becomes excruciating.

On the whole, this reeks of a game that's been playtested only by people too involved to notice the obvious flaws.

Omega Strain is over-complicated, muddled and drab. Eventually, it's possible to assimilate its many design eccentricities and, if not have fun, then at least struggle through to the conclusion, but it's a slog that few will want to endure.

Edge rating: Three out of ten









Checkpoints are particularly bothersome, with some levels respawning your character near multiple enemies – a pain if you've also run out of ammo. Running away is the only option



The objectives are unclear and often convoluted, a factor not helped by having the goalposts changed mid-mission. Forces friendly to your cause work independently and you are advised not to hit them, as indicated by large red icons

A friend in need

An online cooperative mode can be played with up to four friends. This is better than the singleplayer experience, but only because it proves there's truth in the maxim a trouble shared is a trouble halved. To give Bend its due, some welcome features make the coop play interesting. It's possible, for instance, to find new areas in familiar levels by lifting teammates over previously impassable barriers. These novelties are short-lived, however, and the boredom soon sets in.

Custom Robo Battle Revolution

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **Noise** Price: **¥6,800 (£34)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**



There are obligatory, and decent, multiplayer modes thrown in, but it's also possible to go head to head against multiple opponents in the Story mode. Your robo enters the arena after being shot out of an adjustable tube. This is then followed by a random countdown that can give you an early quick hit







Subtitling this *Battle Revolution* could be considered a breach of advertising standards: it's about as revolutionary as a racing game with powerslides. But while *Custom Robo* lacks a fresh hook, it's done with such a diligent simplicity that it's hard not to take a shine to it.

The game's daily routine soon becomes familiar: wake up, get out of bed, talk to your mother, then wander around town until you get into a virtual robo fight. This is an RPG at heart, and though there's plenty of Japanese text to wade through the language barrier never gets in the way of the customisation features. In Story mode battles get ever harder, but the acquisition of robo parts from pods placed in the game's major locations helps give it depth. Arena combat is well managed and there are no major control issues, but the game lacks a dynamic edge. Despite over 200 upgrades, swapping and utilising parts never becomes as sophisticated as in more established mech games like From's *Armored Core* series. Indeed, *Custom Robo* often feels like simple Sticklebricks compared to *AC*'s intricate Meccano.

Edge rating: Five out of ten

Van Helsing

Format: **Xbox (version tested) PS2** Publisher: **Vivendi Universal** Developer: **Saffire** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E132**, **E135**

Many titles are likened to *Devil May Cry*, but *Van Helsing* appropriates that game's structure with such brazen thoroughness that it might be this generation's *Great Giana Sisters*.

Surprisingly, what galls isn't Saffire's audacity, nor how the developer has largely failed to capture the nuances of *DMC*'s mechanics. It's that *Van Helsing*'s more laudable elements – the grappling gun, alternate ammunition settings to target specific monster types, and a frontend that remembers your position in the quest to allow instant access – suggest the game could have been so much more had its production team eased their grip on Dante's coattails. After all, the hollow gun-juggling pales in comparison with harpooning an airborne foe and reeling it in to shotgun range.

It's attractively presented, and progression is smooth – to the extent that every fight can be won by holding down the fire button and occasionally dodging (though there's little sport in doing so). This approach ensures you'll enjoy all the game has to offer in one playthrough – but after the credits roll, you're unlikely to go back for more.

Edge rating: Five out of ten









Helsing's grappling gun is the game's standout mechanic – it can rope in wayward enemies or, fired into a distant wall, zip Helsing along the ground. Sadly, *Bionic Commando*-style vertical swings are only available in prescribed areas

Smash Court Tennis Pro Tournament 2

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEE** Developer: **Namco** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

Here's an oddity: a tennis game that rewards success by making you play less tennis. While not an entirely fair summation of the mission-based career mode, it's a more interesting place to start than the thoroughly competent display of arcade tennis which constitutes the rest of the game.

Big names, recognisably rendered, complement a build-your-own-player option, complete with unlockable wristbands and stat-boosting racquets. Shot choice is divided over four face buttons, with power determined by precise swing timing rather than by getting to the ball early. *Top Spin* veterans will find the new rhythm a little awkward. Other than some disappointing visuals, there's little to complain about in arcade, exhibition and multiplayer modes.

Career mode plays out matches automatically, calling you in at critical moments to win key games and meet objectives, such as serving consecutive aces. Succeed, and the game will be won without further effort. Although this hones skills, you're likely to feel any improvements have more to do with the stat points you earn. It makes an otherwise solid game feel rather hollow in the middle.

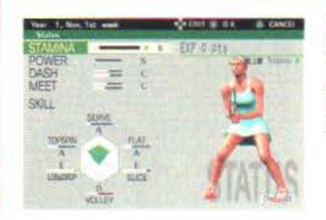


Edge rating: Six out of ten









Despite the inclusion of a specific command, lunging for wide balls is very hit and miss, with the animation unexpectedly jumping your character several feet. Luckily, computer controlled characters find it just as problematic

Mario Golf: Advance Tour

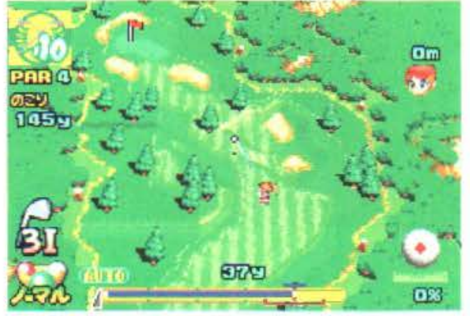
Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **Camelot** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now (Japan) June 21 (US) TBC (UK)**



Pulsing arrows and gentle shading adequately describe the contours of the green, but close-range putts can be fiddly. Though Lakitu can be summoned to provide a selection of views, his camera isn't equipped with a zoom lens







The Mario franchise is embodied by a font as much as by Mario himself these days. As easily identifiable in kanji as in our own alphabet, those chunky sunlit letters instantly communicate the plump plumber's brand values of exuberance, accessibility and solid fun. He hardly needs to show up any more, and in *Advance Tour*, he barely does.

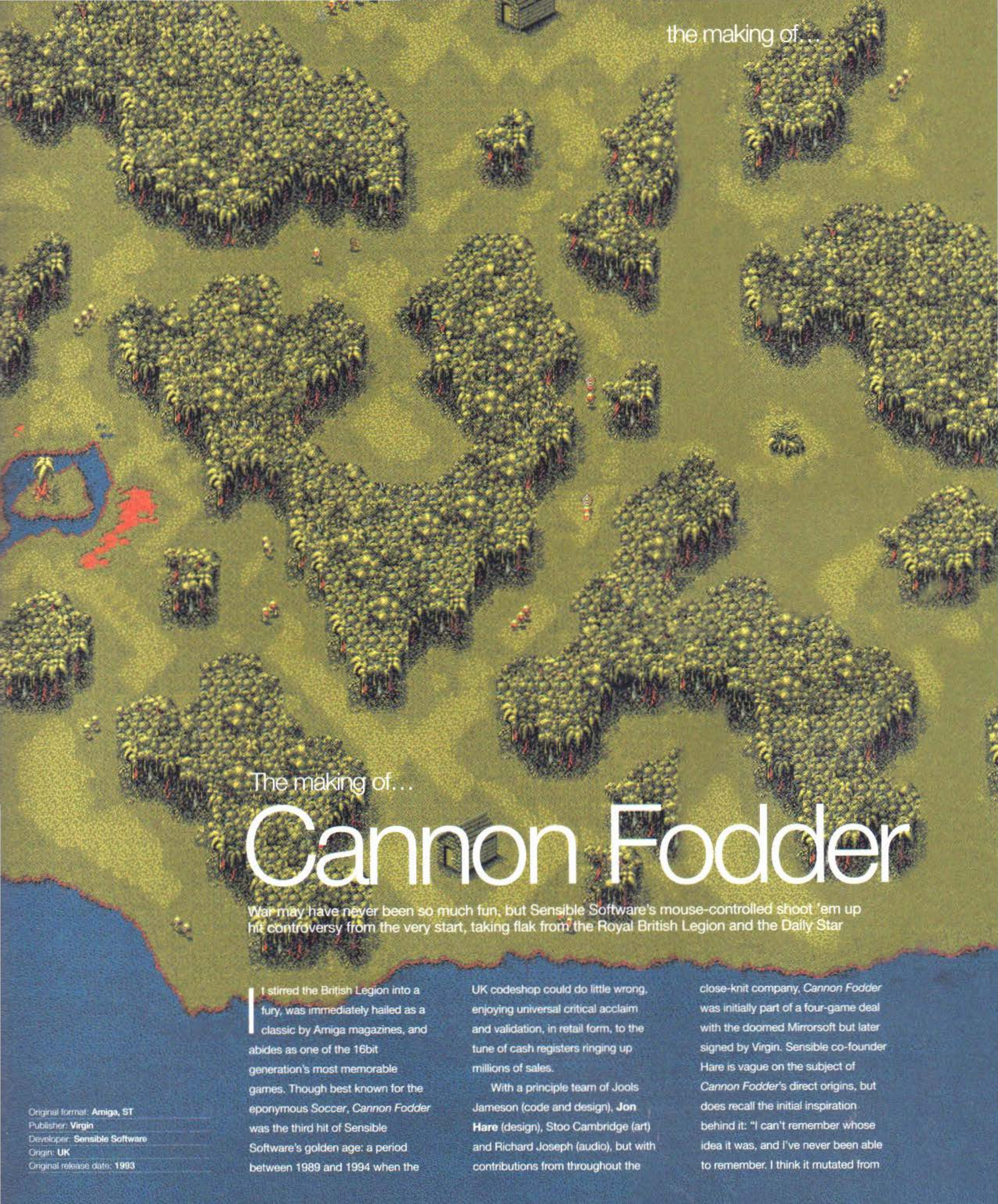
Advance Tour's main attraction is a slim but still cumbersome sports RPG in which you build and shape the golfing skills of a stick-limbed manga kid. The golf itself is hard to criticise, its power-meter mechanics were perfected long before Tiger Woods swang into action, and Camelot wisely hasn't attempted to fix the unbroken.

Stuffed with extra modes, supporting character upload to GC *Toadstool Tour* and bundled with a wireless adapter, *Advance Tour* is great value, but it's also rather clumsy and bland. Only in the minigames, when Mario and company show up both in person and in spirit – hitting against the clock, through gates or with random clubs, and the simple but absorbing approach-shot challenge – does it really find a life of its own.



Edge rating: Six out of ten





The making of...

Cannon Fodder

War may have never been so much fun, but Sensible Software's mouse-controlled shoot 'em up hit controversy from the very start, taking flak from the Royal British Legion and the Daily Star

Original format: **Amiga, ST**
Publisher: **Virgin**
Developer: **Sensible Software**
Origin: **UK**
Original release date: **1993**

It stirred the British Legion into a fury, was immediately hailed as a classic by Amiga magazines, and abides as one of the 16bit generation's most memorable games. Though best known for the eponymous *Soccer*, *Cannon Fodder* was the third hit of Sensible Software's golden age: a period between 1989 and 1994 when the UK codeshop could do little wrong, enjoying universal critical acclaim and validation, in retail form, to the tune of cash registers ringing up millions of sales.

With a principle team of Jools Jameson (code and design), **Jon Hare** (design), Stoo Cambridge (art) and Richard Joseph (audio), but with contributions from throughout the close-knit company, *Cannon Fodder* was initially part of a four-game deal with the doomed Mirrorsoft but later signed by Virgin. Sensible co-founder Hare is vague on the subject of *Cannon Fodder*'s direct origins, but does recall the initial inspiration behind it: "I can't remember whose idea it was, and I've never been able to remember. I think it mutated from



As with *Cannon Fodder*'s smooth scrolling, the busy animation of its tiny protagonists – from firing to expiring in messy explosions of pixel gore – is not something that a screenshot could ever to convey. It was a genuinely slick 16bit game

Buildings – such as the hut pictured above – were a device chosen in homage to Atari's *Gauntlet*, as Hare relates. These were soldier-generating portals, and a source of extra points for completists



While *Cannon Fodder*'s Boot Hill was Sensible's wry, but nonetheless directed, poke at the futility of war, its in-game treatment of combat was rather more black-hearted. Juggling soldiers with bullets, anyone?

an idea we had for a *Gauntlet*-style game, but in a military setting, which is why we ended up with holes in the ground where men ran out – like the ghost-creating machines."

Mega-lo-Mania in shorts

Like other Sensible games of the time, *Cannon Fodder* had a unique visual style. "We had *Mega-lo-Mania*, we had *Sensible Soccer* – the *Mega-lo-Mania* men dressed up in football kit – and we'd established a look, so *Cannon Fodder* was the third 'Sensible look' game on the Amiga and ST," explains Hare. "I think the military-action route was an obvious one. You take a bit of what Sensible stuff looked like, take *Gauntlet*, take explosive hardware, and that gives you an idea of where we started."

Superficially a mouse-driven shoot 'em up, *Cannon Fodder* was more akin to a puzzle game in many respects. Although its earlier levels gave players very simple objectives – kill all enemies, destroy all enemy buildings, or both – play evolved in a manner unusual for its era. Although there were clear boundaries within the confines of an individual stage, the means the player would use to 'solve' any given confrontation required a more evolved response than a simple quick trigger finger. Through tight level design, Sensible provided the means that players could beat a given map. The manner in which the player approached was, somewhat refreshingly for 1993, often his or her own prerogative.

We put *Cannon Fodder*'s evident puzzle game leanings to Hare, and found him entirely receptive to the theory. "I think a lot of military games, or shooting games, miss out on this stuff," he opines. "It's really quite easy to do. I like the way that in *Cannon Fodder* you didn't always go forwards. Sometimes you'd go backwards. You'd find a building and not know how to deal with it, and then travel the map and find a helicopter, then return and blow it up. The levels were very tight. It's the tightest level design we ever did."

That said, *Cannon Fodder* could be brutally difficult in places. Not guiding the player by the hand by offering resources but rarely a readily apparent conclusion, its emphasis on experimentation could lead to some frustrating instances of trial and error. This is a flaw that Hare readily acknowledges. "I think the difficulty curve became a little bit too steep too early," he says. "I think there were a couple of levels, about 16 or 17 in, that people got stuck on. I think, perhaps, that we could have done more to help the non-hardcore players into the later stages."

We get the impression that the development of Cannon Fodder was something of a stroll, an example of a codeshop firing on all cylinders and vaulting all hurdles

Richer rewards

Cannon Fodder, though somewhat exacting in its expectations of player ability, had a reward system worthy of a Nintendo own-brand game. Its various munitions, vehicles and scenarios were introduced in a measured fashion. Beyond every excruciating failure, the prospect of the next satisfying pay-off beckoned. Vehicles, a device in vogue with modern shooters, were a principle *Cannon Fodder* innovation. With the weapons-free skiddoo and jeep, Sensible flirted; with the later introduction of helicopter gunships and tanks, it delivered. "I really like the way we blended people walking with people getting into vehicles," says Hare. "I don't think anyone had really done that before."



The initial batch of *Cannon Fodder* recruits were named after Sensible staffers. Players went to great lengths to keep them alive

Speaking to Hare, we get the impression that the development of *Cannon Fodder* was something of a stroll, an example of a codeshop firing on all cylinders and vaulting all hurdles with relative ease. He does admit, however, that one aspect of its development was at least mildly problematic. Sensible Software might easily have opted for a single commando strolling through its assorted levels but, from an early point, opted to favour players with a group of soldiers that could be separated into individual squads. Hare acknowledges this device as the biggest single technical hurdle the team had to overcome: "I think the biggest problem we had was getting the pathfinding for them right, the sharing of who took the shots, who defaulted to be leader and ensuring that getting in and out of vehicles worked smoothly. That took a lot of work"

The most charming aspect of *Cannon Fodder*, besides its salient qualities as a piece of game design, was that it had a distinct feel, a sense of humour that veered between dry and wet with arterial,

schoolboy-pleasing gore. This was a game that concluded each level with jaunty, circus-style tunes, the surviving soldiers waving or leaping for joy, and yet it took the time to remind players of those that had died during the mission.

In no place was the Sensible humour more apparent than *Cannon Fodder*'s opening sequence, a slideshow of images (taken from a 'pop video' filmed by the team that later appeared on the CD32 release) accompanied by the 'War Has Never Been So Much Fun' theme tune, produced by Hare and respected Amiga tunesmith Richard Joseph. "We got the riff and the singing together, then took those ideas to Richard," recalls Hare. "He added little bits of production work, and the horn lick. I think it's the first decent track to appear with vocals on a games machine. It was the kind of thing we did then: we liked to experiment with the mediums we were dealing with."

Poppy philosophy

One strange aspect of *Cannon Fodder* was that, while it evidently sought to titillate players with byte-sized agony – bursts of blood, writhing sprites and soldiers 'juggled' by gunfire – its treatment of friendly fatalities was unusual. 'Sensitive' is almost certainly not the appropriate word but, oddly, it's the one that leaps most readily to mind. In acknowledging dead soldiers at the end of each mission, by making the menu screen a graveyard that grew with every fatality and according each sprite with its own name, Sensible imbued the soldiers with greater significance.

"I liked the character development – the fact that when they died, they'd appear on the hill," agrees Hare. "I think you identified with soldiers you cared about in the game – they were never expendable. The Boot Hill, *Cannon Fodder*'s menu screen and graveyard, was funny, but it had a point to it. Anyone playing must have twigged about what we were saying when the names of the deceased scrolled up, and the graves appeared: you're having fun, which is one emotion, but at some point you're going to think: Shit, that would have been *me* out in a real battle. I think we got the message across in a gentle way."

Perhaps as an extension of this idea, or as an artful example of media manipulation – depending on your individual take on the ensuing furore – Sensible and Virgin opted to use an individual poppy as the cover image for their shoot 'em up. The Royal British Legion and the Daily Star, mindful of *Cannon Fodder*'s November launch date, took great exception to this decision. 'The poppy is a sacred reminder of the men and women who gave their lives in two world wars,' thundered the Daily Star editorial on October 26, 1993. 'Computer games designers compete to glorify war and viciousness. How dare they use the poppy to turn truth on its head. How sickening it is to see it being abused to sell a savage computer game. The distributors say that the poppy is there "to remind the consumer that war is no joke". That's just publicity writer hypocrisy. Make sure you don't buy this shameful game.'

"I don't remember exactly, but I'm sure that we all just felt the poppy would be a good idea," explains Hare. "People dying in war was an underlying theme. But it's interesting the way it was responded to by the British Legion, who took great offence to it: we were degrading the name of the poppy, as they saw it. But we weren't intending to do that. They thought we were infringing their copyright with the use of the poppy. I think it was an early alarm bell regarding legality and game content.

"We paid them £500, and then they were quiet. That didn't do much for my feelings on their morality, and I've never bought a poppy since. I've already paid £500 for one once."

The cover was dropped and *Cannon Fodder*, as its very first screen was quick to assure players and agents of moral outrage alike, was not officially supported or endorsed by the Royal British Legion. The irony, of course, is that this brief flashpoint served only to raise awareness of *Cannon Fodder*, which topped the Amiga charts, was ported to a variety of consoles and was followed by a successful sequel. One achievement that eluded it, however, was a high profile across the Atlantic.

"From a game design point of view, I'm very, very happy with *Cannon Fodder*," says Hare. "I think it's a tight, clever, easily accessible game. I'm glad that people remember it, and if I've got one regret, it's that it didn't do well in the States. It was the one game we did that could have got us a lot of respect over there. *Sensible Soccer* was never going to work, some of our quirkier stuff wasn't going to happen, but *Cannon Fodder*… it should have done well in the States, and I still can't understand why it didn't."



Blowing up a building could be something of a lottery: there was always a danger that your soldiers could be hit (and killed) by falling debris. Such events were little short of monstrously cruel



Setting off an explosion and beholding a subsequent chain reaction was always a primary *Cannon Fodder* pleasure – and the more enemy soldiers you could take out in the process, the better



While *Cannon Fodder* allowed players to save their game, this message was a dreaded event for all. In this instance, Stoo, Ubik, CJ and Chris fell afoul of a cunningly hidden box of grenades in the lower right-hand corner of the screen. Curses

RESET

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 73, July 1999

E73's cover, using the varnish we would ultimately grow so fond of to map out *Quake III Arena*'s expansive vertices, heralded the approach of id's next masterwork. Inside, a seven-page piece took readers through the company's headquarters, and endeavoured to discover what really made the Texas boutique tick.

A few months later, US prosecutors would be doing exactly the same. 'In a neighbouring state, 12 kids are dead', the article closed, alluding to the Columbine massacre that had happened so recently. No judgements, just an unfortunate kind of serendipity, and not a bad article, if we do say so ourselves.

Less dramatic, but still depressing in its own way, was E3 1999, which we marked as 'disappointing', although the summary did at least provide **Gary Penn** with an opportunity to use the word 'toyset'.

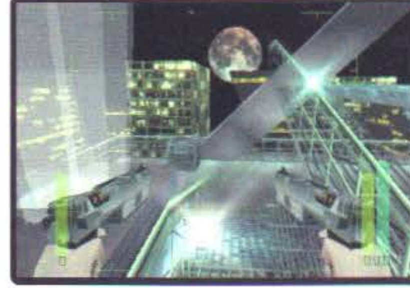
Elsewhere in that month's news section, Nintendo Of America chief **Howard Lincoln** talked up the Dolphin: "We are absolutely confident that Dolphin's graphics will equal or exceed anything our friends at Sony can come up with for PlayStation2." Still, we aren't quite sure why he was bothering, since consoles were evidently about to become obsolete. But if, as noted in the July 1999 issue of **Edge**, high-end games were signalling the beginning of the much-heralded set-top box revolution – illustrated by a shot of Criterion's ATI-powered *Redline Racer* running on a generic black cuboid – then how come, five years later, we can't get *Halo* on our digibox? And, for that matter, where's our flying car? Damned future.

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?
'How queer.' Our response to finding an American magazine devoted to the gay market that happens to share our name

DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?
"I dunno, it just feels good. When they explode in the air and there are body parts flying around – it's like fireworks." Id level designer **Brandon James** explains why the railgun is his favourite weapon

TESTSCREENS AND RATINGS
Soul Reaver (PS / PC, 8/10); *Hidden And Dangerous* (PC, 9/10); *Star Wars: Episode 1 The Phantom Menace* (PC, 5/10); *EverQuest* (PC, 8/10); *Midtown Madness* (PC, 8/10); *Star Wars: Episode 1 Racer* (N64, 6/10); *F-1 World Grand Prix II* (N64, 7/10); *Omega Boost* (PS, 7/10)


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1 *Quake III Arena*. Carmack talks NURBS, and we pay attention 2 *Perfect Dark* – 'the potential for something revolutionary remains' 3 A disappointing E3 fails to hypnotise us 4 Although some people will do anything for a free Dreamcast, won't they, Mr Law? 5 'A rather tired, ragged-looking Sonic' 6 *Red Dog*. "Star Fox in a tank," said Jez San. "Hmm," everyone else responded 7 **Edge** is gay 8 *Dynamite Cop 2*, coming to arcade and Dreamcast 9 Handbags at dawn at Elixir 10 'Made In Hong Kong' looks at a different Asian game market



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A discourse prompted by April's (**E**135) *Resident Evil* cover. Understandably, the magazine came wrapped in plastic to prevent the image from catching the unwary eye while scanning the magazine rack. I mean it's pretty horrific, but that's kind of what you expect – it's a horror game. It's not often though that you hear people criticise this kind of violence in the same way as they might with the *GTA*s of the world. Admittedly, when violence still had the capacity to shock in new ways, films like The Texas Chainsaw Massacre would create a stir, but now you rarely see anything new. It's more a matter of extremes.

It's an age-old argument, which started involving computer games as soon as *Pac-Man* grew legs and started to sport a gun. In the same way many parents decide to not buy their kids guns as toys, I remember games like *Commando* on the C64 being frowned upon for introducing war to children as something that is fun (I was quite young at the time and found such views almost ridiculous). These things are far from being visually violent, so it's often not the actual content of games that offends, but what is implied. It doesn't glamorise it. Certainly not when it's our protagonist getting his throat torn into by said tree-felling device. If anything, it makes it literally as horrific as possible – the idea is to scare people, after all. I think other games could learn something from this: violence can be depicted as something far more real, not by rendering hi-res gore but by making a violent encounter something scary, as it should be, not a throwaway moment that causes people to laugh at how far the dismembered limb flies across the room. That, I think, is the real crime.

It sounds like games such as *ShellShock: Nam '67* (**E**134) may be taking things along this route and I think it is certainly a good thing that some will try to make a more visceral experience. The game will almost certainly receive complaints for being too violent, but war is of that nature. A good documentary on the same subject doesn't get slated for depicting atrocities, in fact it is often commendable when issues like these are tackled. We still class this as entertainment (although I use the term loosely) even though it doesn't make us laugh or get us excited.

So perhaps there is room for games to be horrific and violent and yet receive wider acceptance in society. Not through desensitisation, but by creating experiences which can educate and illustrate how bad this shit really is. Admittedly, this ain't going to be everyone's cup of tea. It is, after all, immense fun to take out a few unsuspecting enemies at a distance with some well-placed head shots; entertainment these days is expected to come hard and fast. I think it's a question of balance, and at the moment violence in games rarely moves beyond a bizarre formula for titillation. No wonder people complain about that.
James Bell

We've long contended that one of the most disturbing facets of videogame violence is not how graphically it is portrayed, but how fantasised and consequence-free its effects are. As games become more accepted as 'adult' products, it becomes easier for these issues to be explored.

I hope I never have to read another word written by Faberlinck ever again. I can barely believe you entertained such nonsense by printing it in your pages. His ideas, as expressed in **E**136, are so ill-conceived and poorly thought out I hardly know where to begin.

I will concede that there probably is a sickening amount of aping going on in the games press, with too few people rating a game for how it plays, as opposed to what score the writer thinks his readers think it should get. However, this is not news. I've been told this often enough before now. That's why I read **Edge** – I see it as one of the last bastions of honesty. What got me going was Faberlinck's idea of a good review, and whether or not games should get a generally bad review if they show a spark of innovation.

I'm sure that there are many **Edge** readers, and indeed readers of other videogame magazines, who spend more time and money on games than anybody they know but can't afford to buy and play them all. As much as the thought tugs on my heart strings, I can't afford to get *MOH: Rising Sun* just because of some home-sickness-related correspondence. If I'm buying a firstperson shooter it's because I want to play a good firstperson shooter, and as such *Rising Sun* won't get a penny or a minute from me.

Time out. I just realised that Faberlinck suggested that this mediocre storytelling trick was innovative, and that the rest of the game's sub-par quality can therefore be excused. Good grief.

Now, if I may, I'd like to consider Faberlinck's idea of what a 'good' review is. Apparently, it's listing 'the facts'. He has lost me slightly here, as he hasn't told us exactly which 'facts' he would like listed. One interpretation of this would be along the lines of: '*Halo* is a game, viewed in the firstperson, where you run around corridors, shooting almost every living thing you see. There are guns of lots of different sizes. Small guns do a small amount of damage. Bigger guns do more.' Not exactly an entertaining read, is it? It would also lead to so many reviews being the same. There is another interpretation of 'the facts', but I fear to suggest it, lest the Fabmeister throws a tantrum. 'The AI in *Breed* is not very good, and the aliens seem retarded.' Fact, or opinion? I'd argue the former, but I could reasonably see either conclusion drawn.

I get the feeling Faberlinck knows that his argument is flawed. The playground posturing at the start of his letter, about how long he's played games, and how long he's been a videogame journalist, does not add weight to his argument, however much he thinks it does. If anything it shows that he needs to get out more.
Andrew Merson

I've been reading your article on Microsoft's XNA (**E**136) with great interest. Somehow, it reminded me of a system they came up with some time ago: MSX.

For the younger readers amongst you, MSX

It is, after all, immense fun to take out a few unsuspecting enemies at a distance with some well-placed head shots; entertainment these days is expected to come hard and fast



Will the new *Bard's Tale*, due later this year on PlayStation2, cause the console RPG to be rethought? Jonathan McCalmont hopes it will

was a popular system in the early '80s, for which Microsoft made the operating system: MSX BASIC (MSX stands for MicroSoft eXtended). Many manufacturers made one or more models with different hardware specs: one had a superior sound chip, another one had an on-board video digitiser, or much more RAM than any other model, and later on there were different processor speeds available, etc, etc.

Whatever the differences, they all had one thing in common: every bit of MSX software could run on any MSX computer, no matter what the hardware specs were. You didn't have to upgrade – it would work. Some programs came with a required hardware add-on (a sound module, a hard disk, a robot arm, whatever), and that too would work on any MSX machine.

And it would have been a great success too, if only the thing had been superior in every aspect to every other brand of 'home computer', as they were called back then: the Atari ST had an on-board MIDI adapter and superior graphics (and, let's face it, superior software as well), the Commodore Amiga had superior graphics and four-channel stereo sound, and even PCs were getting better than any MSX by means of available add-ons like the Sound Blaster and CD-ROM. All of them had more MHz. Many different game consoles were widely available too, and MSX died a quiet death. Which was a pity because coding it was the sweetest piece of cake in programming history.

I really hope they'll get it right this time. I'm sick and tired of upgrading my PC, or buying a new console just to play the latest sequel to my favourite games. If XNA is what we have been waiting for, then let Microsoft license the system to lots of manufacturers, who then can make any machine they wish to.

I'd be quite prepared to buy one last console, suited to my needs, like no broadband modem which I don't use anyway and don't wish to pay for, no expansion slot for aforementioned broadband modem and with the possibility to connect the thing to my low-budget, non-5.1 stereo equipment out of the box. So let Microsoft end the console war, preferably with MSX in mind, as much for the concept as for 'how not to do it'. XNA looks just like the thing we need. Please let them do something useful with it.

Michiel van Leeuwen

Bravo! 'The Rick Dickinson guide to classic computer design' was the freshest article I have read in **Edge** for a very long time. The birth of videogames in Europe owes a lot to the team at Sinclair. Over the years they seem to have been publicity shy, and this has resulted in few journalists managing to investigate the minds behind the design. Please give us more gems like this!

Dan Clapson

I read with interest the thoughts of Brian Fargo on the state of console RPGs (**E**137). Despite the all-conquering might of the *GTA* series on console, we are told that PC-style sandbox RPGs are too complex for the console market. Instead we get over-long and repetitive random encounters and magic animations from Japan and mindless hack and slash from the rest of the world.

I find it deeply depressing that the multibillion dollar console industry has set its sights no higher than emulating a weak Dungeons & Dragons session from the '70s. Whereas paper-and-pencil RPGs have expanded into genre-emulation game mechanics and devolving narrative control to players, computerised RPGs give us dungeon crawls or, if we're lucky, a plot that's more complex than 'gotherekillthat' with a touch more freedom in the shape of a quasi-non-linear game structure.

Even *Fable*'s idea of having control over your character's personality with consequences for your actions seem years away and significantly less revolutionary than initially stated. To the designers of the world I would say "shame" for thinking so little of console gamers and "double shame" for aiming for gaming experiences no more ambitious than those offered by D&D in the '70s. Perhaps the new *Bard's Tale* will prompt them to revisit some of their basic assumptions about what an RPG is because as far as I am concerned Fargo's remarks and ideas are not a revolution or an innovation but very basic common sense.

Jonathan McCalmont

It will be interesting to see where the next generation of MMOs will take the RPG. Perhaps they can perfect a blend of satisfying combat, character growth and interesting interaction.

So the left-handed gamer issue rears its ugly head once more (Cack Hander, **E**137). What's that – the third, fourth time since **Edge**'s inception? It's an issue that I always find interesting, though – as an ambidextrous gamer I usually find a problem in any control system. You might find this odd, but it can be explained by the fact that I have an equal amount of weakness in both hands, not just equal strengths. My heart sinks when I boot up a new PS2 game only to find I can't disable analogue control – I just pray that the developer has included the function to change the analogue sensitivity. Yeah, I was one of those weirdos playing arcades with crossed arms...

The problem is a more fundamental issue of ergonomics than simply swapping the functions of the sticks – what about the buttons? We need a symmetrical controller, and no developer is likely to consider that. The closest we came to perfection was the N64 controller: main stick in the middle with the D-pad mirroring the C buttons = genius. Although they did forget to include the A and B buttons on the left of the stick, which would forever hinder my chances in a *GoldenEye* deathmatch as I'd have to take my right thumb off the stick to reload. Of course, I couldn't be beaten in a strafing standoff with unlimited ammo...

LJ

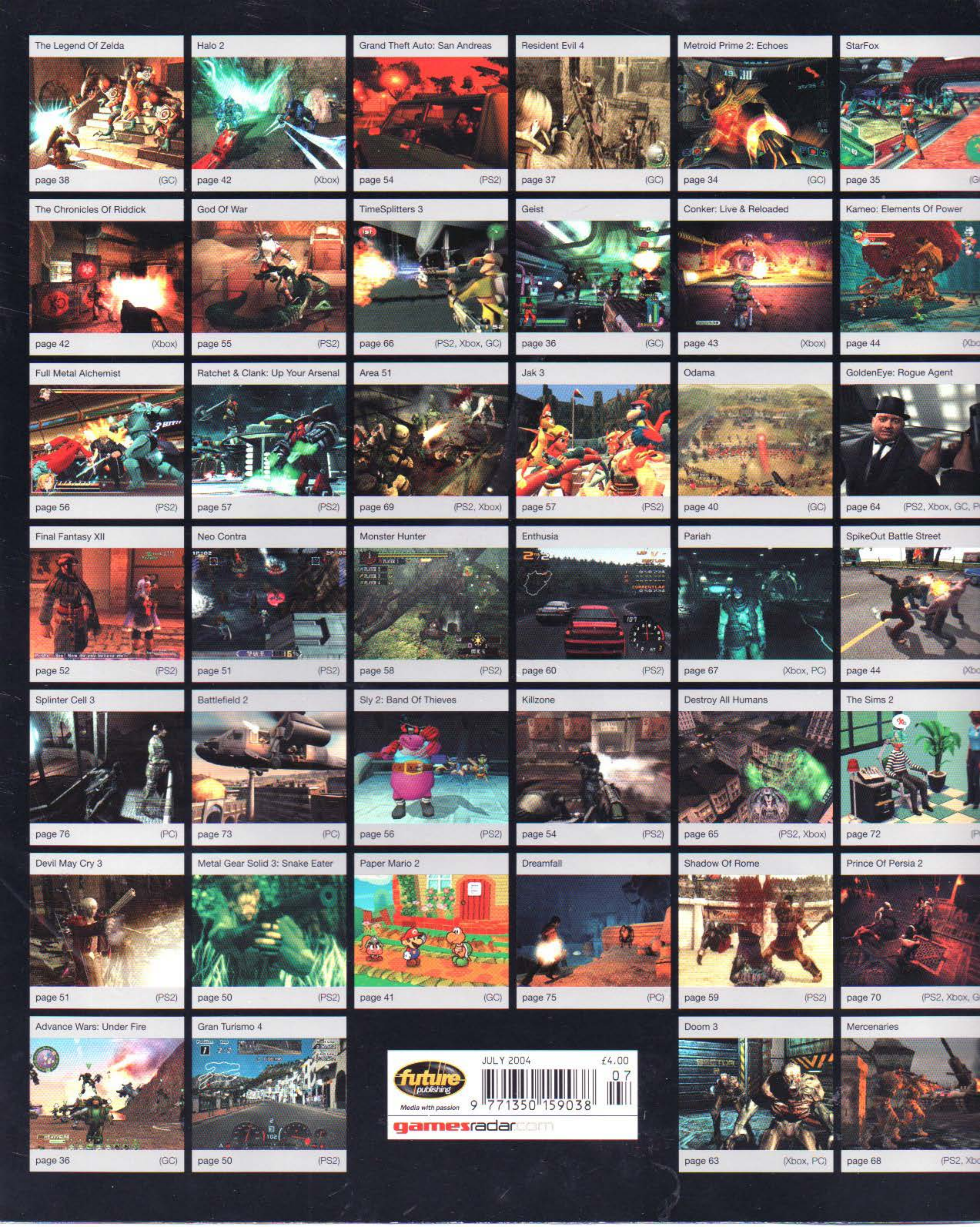
Regardless of the hardware, there's never an excuse for refusing to allow customised controls. Because everyone is different



My heart sinks when I boot up a new PS2 game only to find I can't disable analogue control. I just pray that the developer has included the function to change the analogue sensitivity

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